5-2009

Philosophy and Practice: Examining Classroom Management in Progressive Education Settings

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Bank Street College & Progressive Education

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Philosophy and Practice:

Examining Classroom Management in Progressive Education Settings

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Science in Education
Bank Street College of Education
May 2009

Abstract

Are John Dewey's and Lucy Sprague Mitchell's twentieth century hopes for classroom management realized in the early twenty-first century practices in progressive schools? The viewpoints of these two pioneers in progressive education create the backdrop for examining the execution of classroom management in the present-day progressive educational settings in this study. In order to examine classroom management in practice, three classroom observations and teacher interviews were conducted in progressive schools in New York City. These observations and interviews are compared and analyzed through the lens of Dewey and Mitchell's thoughts about the functioning of a classroom. The study does not claim to arrive at definitive answers to the questions that have been raised about classroom management in progressive settings, but draws conclusions based on the brief glimpses into the workings of these classrooms and the ideas of the teacher participants. This work offers an opportunity to look deeply at how Dewey's and Mitchell's ideas about classroom management might be reflected in the current practices of teachers in progressive schools.

Acknowledgements

I am sincerely grateful to Sal Vascellaro for agreeing to be my mentor, and for seeing this project through from seed to fruition, reassuring me throughout that I would eventually complete this paper. His brilliant insight, endless patience, and gentle guidance have proven invaluable. I must also thank Nancy Gropper, who conducted my Bank Street admissions interview and later became my adviser, fortunately for me. A compassionate and thoughtful role model, she has played a pivotal role in my training as an educator. I am also indebted to faculty and colleagues at both the Bank Street College of Education and the Bank Street School for Children, particularly Laura Guarino, who continually inspire me to contemplate the possibilities of education for young children. To the teachers who welcomed me into their classrooms and took time out of their impossibly busy schedules to participate in this research, I am incredibly grateful. I am thankful to my students past and present—the children who pique my curiosity about how to create an ideal classroom environment and force me to put my ideas about classroom management to the test. In addition, it must be stated, though it may be obvious, that learning about the philosophies of John Dewey and Lucy Sprague Mitchell forever changed the way in which I think about education.

My family and friends were incredible sources of support and distraction as I navigated this writing process. Thank you to Barbara Todd for meeting my procrastination needs with her stimulating phone conversations—and for proofreading this paper from the Florida coast. I am endlessly thankful for the love and humor of my mom, Gwen, my brother, Jay, and my sister, Jaimie. Throughout my graduate studies, I have been touched and rallied by the pride that my mother has shown in me and in my work. Finally, I thank my husband, Adam Brown, for his keen intellect, unflagging encouragement, and deep love. He not only embraced John Dewey and Lucy Sprague Mitchell as household names, but also had faith in me through every inch of this lengthy process.

Some Needs and Impulses of Children that Can Be
Partially Fulfilled in Their School Lives

All children need

To:

feel safe and unafraid;
feel that people care about them and are interested in them;
feel understood as children and accepted as people;
trust people;
think well of themselves and develop confidence;
get a sense that it's only human to make mistakes—everyone does.

To:

realize rules are needed to make things run smoothly;
accept authority without cringing before it;
believe that they are being treated fairly and justly;
form a close group relation among themselves;
have a right to a few secrets of their own;
have a chance to enjoy co-operation more than competition;
live democratically in order to believe in democracy.

To:

play;
be active;
express their feelings;
make some of their own choices;
have plenty of opportunity to imagine and create;
try out there talents and inclinations.

To:

become skilled and capable;
be entrusted with responsibility;
take some part in adult affairs;
feel that what they are learning is important and interesting;
have heroes and ideals;
understand the world in which they live;
identify with the miracles of modern life and the adventure of human progress
realize that people everywhere are trying to work out the same problems.

Taken from *Our Children and Our Schools: A Picture and Analysis of How Today's Public School Teachers are Meeting the Challenge of New Knowledge and New Cultural Needs* by Lucy Sprague Mitchell (1950, pp. 23-24).

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Introduction

While taking a curriculum course for my graduate degree at the Bank Street College of Education, I wrote a paper examining John Dewey's (1938) ideas about social control in the classroom. I was immediately intrigued by this idea of classroom management formulated through a positive lens. In lieu of thinking about classroom management in isolation, Dewey revealed its connections to the development of a class community, as well as to the curriculum being put into practice. Dewey raises many interesting points that led me to question: How is community genuinely fostered within a classroom? If classroom management begins with curriculum, how does one define curriculum? How do teachers in specific progressive settings approach classroom management? How are these fundamental ideas about community and classroom management reflected in progressive educational settings currently, if reflected at all? Are Dewey's early twentieth century hopes realized in the early twenty-first century practices in progressive schools? I also began to reflect on my own approach to classroom management, and the way in which classrooms functioned in the variety of traditional and progressive settings in which I was a teacher and tutor. As an early childhood educator who currently teaches in a progressive school, and as one who also taught in a more traditional setting, I recognize the struggle of effectively managing a classroom and all that is encompassed in those day-to-day acts. Since I first started teaching, I have been wondering how it is that teachers can best serve their students, keeping a sense of order in the classroom while fostering trusting relationships and an environment conducive to meaningful learning—secure but not stifling. It is a tall order.

Around the same time that I read Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938), I also read a biography about Lucy Sprague Mitchell, the founder of the Bank Street College of Education. I was as intrigued by her philosophy and her role as a pioneer in the field of progressive education as I was by Dewey. Mitchell's ideas about how teachers and children care for one another in a classroom setting, as well as in the context of a broader community, link well to Dewey's ideas about social control in the classroom. While clearly influenced and shaped by Dewey's theories, Mitchell (1950) adds a layer to thinking about children in a school setting—the examination of children's behaviors and needs through the lens of child development. The viewpoints of these two pioneers create an interesting backdrop for looking at the execution of classroom management in present-day progressive schools.

In this thesis, I will explore John Dewey and Lucy Sprague Mitchell's ideas about classroom management using the texts *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (2005/1916), *Experience and Education* (1938), and *The School and Society & The Child and the Curriculum* (2001/1915) by Dewey and *Our Children and Our Schools: A Picture and Analysis of How Today's Public School Teachers are Meeting the Challenge of New Knowledge and New Cultural Needs* (1950) by Mitchell. In order to examine classroom management in practice, I conducted observations in three classrooms in progressive schools and interviewed the head teachers from those classes. I will discuss the specifics of my research in the methodology section of this paper and the write-ups of the classroom visits and interviews, which I have included in the body of this work. These observations and interviews are followed by a section of comparison and analysis. The paper concludes by piecing together Dewey's and Mitchell's theories with

the practice of classroom management in the three progressive educational sites in which I observed. I am not claiming to arrive at definitive answers to the questions that I have raised about classroom management in progressive settings, but will draw conclusions based on my brief glimpses into the workings of these classrooms and the ideas of the teacher participants. I am certainly not generalizing my conclusions to all progressive schools; this is a limited exploration. Doing this work has provided me with an opportunity to think deeply about how Dewey and Mitchell's ideas about classroom management might be reflected in the work that teachers in progressive settings do today.

Classroom Management: The Views of Two Pioneers in Progressive Education

An Exploration of John Dewey's Thoughts about Classroom Management: The Intersection of Social Control, Classroom Community, and Curriculum

John Dewey (1859-1952), a philosopher, psychologist, and educator, was a pioneering force in progressive education (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). His works, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1916/2005), *The School and Society & The Child and the Curriculum* (1915/2001) and *Experience and Education* (1938), offer incredible insight into his thinking about education as a whole, and his ideas and ideals for how children might grow and learn in a progressive school setting. For this study, I will be focusing on Dewey's ideas about classroom management, which he referred to as *social control*. However, for Dewey, social control is not approached in isolation—it is deeply intertwined with the entire functioning of the class, from social interactions to classroom environment to curriculum.

In *Experience and Education* (1938), Dewey devotes an entire chapter to the topic of social control within the classroom. Using examples from life outside the classroom, particularly those of organized games and sports, Dewey illustrates the ways in which social control does not have to result in the inhibition of individual freedom, but rather can enhance group interactions. Envisioning the workings and dynamics of a group, Dewey explores possibilities for fostering *positive* social control within a classroom. His thoughts about social control in a progressive classroom are a far cry from the role of discipline in a traditional classroom. The very nature of progressive education as Dewey

defines it seems to alleviate the desire and need for strict discipline and obedience that educators in traditional settings may deem necessary. In fact, in a traditional setting, where teachers may view themselves as the dispensers of knowledge, and as the "boss" of the class, obedience would be highly valued. Dewey looks at the role of social control in progressive education in a markedly different way. What emerges as the core of Dewey's ideas about classroom management are: creating a feeling of community within the classroom; offering opportunities for learning experiences that are meaningful to children and that foster personal investment; planning curriculum thoughtfully, in a way intended to cultivate children's social connections through the experience of shared work; and examining the teacher's role in the class community.

The social aspect of schooling is never far from Dewey's (1938) mind. He states, "The principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process" (p. 58). For teachers, this idea not only shapes the view of her/his role in the classroom (disciplinarian or facilitator?), but also the roles of the students (passive or active learners?) and the content of the curriculum. The role of community is paramount in the type of classroom that Dewey envisions. Personal investment and responsibility, as well as concern for the well-being of others and the group as a whole, contribute to creating an environment where learning takes place without the need for constant discipline.

Dewey (1915/2001) also purports that through language, the social can meet the academic. He asserts that "...language is primarily a social thing, a means by which we give our experiences to others and get theirs again in return" (p. 35). He also states:

> When the language instinct is appealed to in a social way, there is a continual contact with reality…the child who has a variety of materials and facts wants to talk about them, and his language becomes more refined and full, because it is controlled and informed by realities. Reading and writing, as well as the oral use of language, may be taught on this basis. It can be done in a related way, as the outgrowth of the child's social desire to recount his experiences and get in return the experiences of others…. (p. 35)

One could glean from this that in a progressive educational setting, small and large group discussion is an important part of fostering social relationships among students, as well as encouraging interest in activities related to language itself. Again, this rubs up against the notions of a traditional classroom—where most of the conversation would be controlled and directed by a teacher, and language may be compartmentalized into a language arts period. This alters the dynamic of classroom management, as teachers adjust their expectations for spontaneity and noise level.

Community is also fostered through the types of activities—the curriculum—that occur in a classroom, which in turn mediate classroom management. Activities and experiences in the classroom must be meaningful and engaging for students. When students are invested in classroom life and their own learning, the need for teacher disciplinary intervention is greatly diminished. In discussing social control in a traditional setting, Dewey asserts (1938), "He [the teacher] kept it [order] because order was in the teacher's keeping, instead of residing in the shared work being done" (p. 55). In the type of education that Dewey promotes, "…the primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the work done as a social enterprise in which all individuals have an

opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility" (p. 56). One gains a sense of the type of classroom that Dewey (1915/2001) envisions from the following statement:

> ...if the end in view is the development of a spirit of social cooperation and community life, discipline must grow out of and be relative to such an aim. There is little of one sort of order where things are in process of construction; there is a certain disorder in any busy workshop; there is not silence; persons are not engaged in maintaining certain fixed physical postures; their arms are not folded; they are not holding their books thus and so. They are doing a variety of things, and there is the confusion, the bustle that results from activity. But out of the occupation, out of doing things to produce results, and out of doing these in a social and cooperative way, there is born a discipline of its own kind and type. Our whole conception of discipline changes when we get this point of view. (p. 12)

In this classroom, children would not be expected to remain continuously still and quiet as passive receivers of knowledge, but would engage wholeheartedly in their learning experiences, sharing their enthusiasms with one another. In this setting, the work that children do, individually and together, is the driving force behind their level of engagement with classroom life. As Dewey asserts, discipline takes on a new meaning.

The school environment is another consideration for Dewey—the physical setup of the classroom itself and knowledge of the neighborhood surrounding the school. Dewey (1938) contends that teachers need to be cognizant of both, as exemplified in his statement below:

> A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while. (p. 40)

Just as teachers plan opportunities for "educative experiences" for children, they must also plan the classroom space. The arrangement of furniture and materials influences the type of learning that will occur in the classroom. For example, do the materials offered invite children to work together, or do the materials require solitary work? The planning of this essential space, including the divisions of different areas of the room, will shape the way in which children interact with one another and engage with the materials available to them. Dewey emphasizes that teachers "can direct the experience of the young without engaging in imposition" (p. 40).

Dewey (1938) recognizes that it can be quite challenging to create the types of experiential opportunities and activities that students will respond to with enthusiasm and commitment, and this requires thoughtful planning. He sees that creating a feeling of community within the classroom also necessitates care and thought. Dewey seems to want to dispel the myth, as well as the criticism, that planning is not necessary in a progressive classroom. In fact, he notes that teachers in a progressive setting, evaluating the social workings of their classrooms, have the intense challenge of thinking deeply about each of their students in order to foster relationships and to enhance meaningful learning. The social and academic goals for children go hand-in-hand. Dewey is also not

naïve; although he devotes little space to specifics in his chapter, *Social Control*, he is quite aware that individual children may pose classroom management challenges for teachers in terms of their behavior, whether through lack of participation and contribution or by being "unruly" and "rebellious" (p. 56). Dewey acknowledges that teachers need to deal with each child individually, in an attempt to get to the root of the situation. However, Dewey insists that these exceptions to the rule should not *make* the rule.

Dewey's (1938) chapter on social control was written, in part, as a reaction to critiques of classroom management in progressive education settings. Dewey clarifies that in no way was he encouraging teachers to allow chaos to ensue in their classrooms, giving children license to behave according to their own whims. While the type of classroom he envisioned gave children the freedom to construct knowledge through their own experiences, it did not give them freedom to entirely run, or overrun, the classroom. Children have a voice, but ultimately the teacher is the adult, and the person who, through thoughtful planning, finds ways to manage the classroom effectively. Teachers must observe children carefully and plan accordingly for individuals and the class as a whole, certainly not a simple task. Some thought that Dewey asked too much of teachers—who would meet his standards for being an educator? And, perhaps more important, what happens when teachers misunderstand his pedagogical theory? Lawrence Cremin (1961/1964) discusses the pitfalls of the misinterpretation of progressive education in his work *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957*. His critique of progressive education gone awry is characterized below:

> ... the doctrine of creative self-expression raised the same problems in education as it raised elsewhere. Taken up as a fad, it elicited not only first-rate art, but

> every manner of shoddiness and self-deception as well. In too many classrooms license began to pass for liberty, planlessness for spontaneity, recalcitrance for individuality, obfuscation for art, and chaos for education—all justified in the rhetoric of expressionism. And thus was born at least one of the several caricatures of progressive education in which humorists reveled—quite understandably—for at least a generation. (p. 207)

This was certainly not what Dewey intended. If anything, as discussed earlier, Dewey (1938) believes that progressive educators must be attentive to planning on many levels: individual and general development, recognizing and addressing the interests of the children, and designing the curriculum.

In Dewey's writings about education, it is clear that he does have high expectations for teachers. Dewey asserts (1938) that the teacher must consider her/his role in the classroom community. In a traditional setting, a teacher may regard her/himself as the dispenser of knowledge, or the "boss or dictator" (p. 59) of the class, but in the *new* education of which Dewey speaks, the teacher has a very different role. The students and the teacher are part of a community, and the teacher thinks about classroom management (social control) in relation to what has been discussed above: creating a community that meets the social needs of children and careful planning for experiential learning. The teacher plays an important role in this community. As the adult, the "most mature member" of the class community, the teacher is expected to possess greater wisdom—to demonstrate a deep understanding both of individual children and content knowledge (p. 56). According to Dewey, teachers must use their assessment of the "capacities and needs" of her/his individual students in conjunction

with knowledge of subject matter in order to create the settings for learning "that satisfy these needs and develop these capacities" (p. 58). While planning in advance is absolutely necessary, teachers are challenged to create plans that are simultaneously solid and flexible—plans that are purposeful yet allow space for the individual experiences that emerge during the learning process. Dewey asserts, "When education is based upon experiences and educative experience is seen as a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities" (p. 59). Dewey seems to view teachers as facilitators of learning, and if the classroom set-up and curriculum are planned accordingly, then there is no need for the teacher to assume a dictatorial attitude. That type of social control would only impede the active, engaging learning that progressive education hopes to achieve.

Dewey (1916/2005) saw the view of classroom functioning described in this section as essential to the democratic process. For Dewey, schools' processes would serve as laboratories for the cultivation of democratic citizens—engaged and responsible members of society. He viewed democracy on a basic level as a form of "associated living," and believed that a democratic way of living should be fostered in schools. When describing democracy, Dewey states:

> The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. (p. 101)

According to Dewey, in a democratic society, education should embody democratic ideals, giving "individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (p. 115). One can see how Dewey's thoughts about social control in the classroom setting bloom from his central focus on democracy. Guiding children to learn how to care for individuals, as well as to consider the interests of the group as a whole, is essential to Dewey's philosophy about classroom management.

An Exploration of Lucy Sprague Mitchell's Thoughts about Classroom Management

In her detailed account of Bank Street's collaboration with teachers in the public school system, *Our Children and Our Schools: A Picture and Analysis of How Today's Public School Teachers are Meeting the Challenge of New Knowledge and Cultural Needs* (1950), Lucy Sprague Mitchell provides a window into her thoughts about how schools should function. This book serves as documentation of the collaboration between professionals at Bank Street and teachers in the New York City public school system in their attempt to see if "modern methods in education" could be effectively applied in large urban public schools (p. vii). Many conversations among these educators were transcribed, curriculum development was detailed, and the entire process was closely and meticulously recorded. Mitchell authored many works, but she typically focused on specific curriculum and the education of teachers. *Our Children and Our Schools* is distinct from her other writings in that it offers a firsthand, practitioner view of childhood education, and delves into the fabric of classroom life. I will be drawing heavily from this rich text in order to examine Mitchell's thoughts about classroom management. Her chapters entitled, "A Good Life: for Children; for Teachers," "The School's Job," and "Thinking About the Development of Children" all address ideas related to classroom management. In keeping with many of John Dewey's ideas about *social control*, Mitchell has quite a humanistic approach to what she refers to as *discipline.*

For Mitchell (1950), discipline is always considered through the lens of child development—there is a deeply psychological dimension to understanding children. Knowledge of child development and making plans for discipline (classroom

management) seem to go hand in hand for Lucy Sprague Mitchell. A philosophy for how teachers should treat and exist with children in the classroom evolved through thinking about child development. Positive, human, and group relationships seem to be central to classroom management. Teachers must arrive at an understanding of individual children, as well as deep comprehension of the stages of child development. Mitchell asserts:

> The best we can do is to plan a school life in each grade to fit the development that most children of that age reach, then modify the school life to a higher or lower stage of development to fit a particular child or often a whole group. (p.11)

Teachers must respond to the needs of individuals in addition to the needs of the group. This could be extrapolated to think not only in terms of academics, but social and emotional development as well.

Mitchell (1950) openly admits that the teachers' attention to child development actually sprung from an "initial interest in 'difficult' children" (p. 103). In early meetings with the collaborating public school teachers, Mitchell and other Bank Street faculty heard accounts of the children's misbehavior, and the teachers' loss at how to help the "difficult" children (p. 103). Many teachers felt that students who were extremely disturbing in class should not have been in school. While Dewey (1938) briefly mentions the existence of such cases, when individual children pose challenges for teachers, he speaks little to the practical side of understanding these children. Mitchell (1950), a teacher herself, makes statements that appear to be more personal than Dewey's, more from the perspective of someone who has lived through this process with children. She states, "They [the teachers] were thinking of the disturbance caused by difficult children, not the disturbance children feel. Problem children were more real to them than

children's problems—the difficulties all children encounter in the course of growing up" (p. 104). In an attempt to *understand* rather than dismiss these children and the behavior that teachers found so troubling, teachers began to do case studies of individual children. When teachers requested more guidance in the writing of these case studies, the Bank Street psychologist wrote out a series of detailed questions which were intended to explore all aspects of the child—cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, family life, etc.

Notes from meetings with the Bank Street psychologist, Bank Street members, and public school teachers reveal candid and thought-provoking dialogue about things such as rewards for good social or academic behavior (one teacher pointed out, and others agreed, that the reward should be internal, from the satisfaction of the good work or behavior) and the notion of cooperation versus competition within the group (i.e. the rewarding feeling of a successful cooperative effort such as putting on a play). In one meeting, a Bank Street member also brought up the importance of making positive comments about children's work when appropriate, since so often teachers get might get caught up in addressing the negative characteristics of children's work (Mitchell, 1950). Again, these debates reveal much about what Mitchell and other Bank Street members thought about the way teachers should approach classroom situations, and of course children themselves.

Mitchell (1950) and the other Bank Street members also thought deeply about the reasons *why* children accept control—a respectful relationship between child and adult or a fearful one. Mitchell insists:

> We must try to understand for ourselves what are the healthiest ways in which to have children accept control. We are looking for a kind of school life where the *children will do what the teacher expects not because they are afraid of her but more because they like her*.... What we are looking for is an acceptance of the teacher's authority, not on the basis of fear... but on a new basis of establishing a sound, positive relationship between the teacher and the children. (p. 120)

The humanity of the teacher is central in this type of approach. Building positive relationships between the teacher and individual children is absolutely essential. Mitchell often considers the emotional tenor of the classroom, and discusses the ways in which teachers can create an environment where children feel safe, secure, and understood, in addition to learning to trust others, develop confidence, and feel comfortable making mistakes (Mitchell, 1950). Mitchell also writes about the notion of teachers rejecting certain behaviors without causing the child to feel rejected:

> We are trying to get the child to believe, by the way we treat him, not that he is bad, but that he is a child liked by the teacher, who every once in a while thinks he does something bad, but come what may she will never put him outside her feelings. (p. 123).

This is quite a distinction.

Like Dewey (1938), Mitchell (1950) also discusses the role of the teacher as an adult member of the class community. She states:

> The teacher-child and the child-teacher relationship is a close one in a more significant way than spending hours each day together in the same room. There must be a sharing of interest, a sharing of planning, a sharing of putting interests

> into action. The teacher remains an adult though she becomes a member of the group. Her role is different from the role of the children. But it remains true that teacher and children must have a good life *together*, or neither will have a good life. (p. 17)

The emotional well-being of *all* members of the group is important. In addition, Mitchell contends that teachers can let their humanity and individuality emerge through their interactions with students. Mitchell appears to value genuine, spontaneous, and warm exchanges between teachers and students. She opposes the idea that teachers and parents must be grim in order to keep children in check. Instead, she encourages teachers to be their authentic selves. Mitchell describes a "good teacher" below:

> Schools used to regard a good teacher as one who could keep her children attentive, receptive, quiet, and discipline them when they weren't. Schools are moving towards regarding a good teacher as one who keeps children's interests alive, actively doing, actively thinking, actively learning self-discipline, actively a member of the school group… a teacher should be a member of his group, a guide rather than a supreme authority, entering into children's interests and pursuing investigation and activities with them in a warm human relationship. (p. 28)

This image reflects Dewey's (1938) philosophy about educators, as well.

Mitchell (1950) describes how the role of discipline changes as children grow and develop. She purports, "For the young child there is a need for direct expression of affection, warmth, praise, and just a kind of human lovingness" (p. 122). Mitchell also recognizes the needs of young children when she writes, "If you do not take the responsibility of helping them [children] control their feelings when they are young they

will feel lost" (p. 122). However, the role of self-regulation is significant. Mitchell states, "Once children are permitted to be free and are active they must also be able to hold themselves back" (p. 120). Self-regulation is developed over time, and is increasingly expected of older children. For children ages seven through ten, even more so than in their younger years, teachers exert the most control through the force of the curriculum, and by fostering children's genuine interest in classroom activities, as well as a love of classroom life. This is very much in line with Dewey's assertions about the connection between classroom management and curriculum. Also consistent with Dewey (1938), Mitchell (1950) recognizes that some children might not meet the behavioral expectations of the teacher, and that these children would require individualized help. Mitchell acknowledges the outliers, admitting, "In all honesty we do not know how to handle the really difficult and deeply disturbed children in the classroom" (p. 124). When discussing "difficult" children, she takes a compassionate stance, always looking to understand the child and the possible reasons behind certain behaviors, such as aggressive acts.

When Mitchell (1950) recounts the collaborative conversations about "freedom in the classroom," many questions arise (p. 118). Mitchell and the Bank Street members agreed that a certain level of control must be maintained, but they grappled with what discipline should look like in the classroom. Like Dewey (1938), the Bank Street psychologist talked about working with children "through curriculum and program" (Mitchell, 1950, p. 119). Similar to the educational settings that Dewey envisions in his writings, the classrooms that Mitchell discusses have a palpable energy level and an industrious noisiness about them. As in Dewey's (1938) education philosophy, the movement and noise are no synonym for classroom chaos. Mitchell (1950) openly talks

about the challenges that this can pose for teachers as they find an effective balance in the classroom:

> When you allow children to be more active and more free to express themselves, it builds up naturally to a greater amount of noise and excitement and a greater amount of shuffling around the room… she [the teacher] isn't sure just how noisy to let the children get. She may feel that if she lets them become too noisy they may get out of her control altogether. She has to develop the techniques for being able to put a stop to things when they get too noisy or too excited, etc.... Every teacher has to find for herself what are her standards of acceptable behavior for children in a free program. (p. 122)

This speaks volumes to the type of classroom management that the founders of progressive education envisioned. For Mitchell, like Dewey, classroom management is more than a series of learned techniques, but rather a thoughtful, responsive, and understanding approach to children and classroom life.

Methodology

I wanted to conduct classroom observations and teacher interviews in order to examine classroom management in practice in specific progressive educational settings. Due to time constraints and practicality, I had to make this endeavor manageable, and settled on observing for one morning in three different settings, and interviewing the head teachers from each classroom. I was restricted in my choice by the availability and willingness of schools and teachers to participate in this research, running into a few roadblocks before being able to conduct these observations and interviews. Upon the recommendations of faculty from the Bank Street College of Education, I chose which classrooms to observe based on the schools and the teachers who might provide me with rich material. I wanted to observe in classrooms where the teachers had connections to the Bank Street College of Education, and were hence influenced by Lucy Sprague Mitchell's beliefs, either through attending graduate school there or working with student teachers from the institution. I also chose teachers who, based on the progressive settings in which they taught, were likely to have been influenced by John Dewey's theories and philosophies during their teacher preparation. The names of the teachers and children discussed in this work have been changed in order to disguise their identities, maintaining their privacy. While I provide descriptions of the schools, I do not refer to them by name.

Since my interest is in early childhood education, I wanted to observe in early childhood classrooms. I planned to focus on classrooms with children age 5, since this is an age when children often begin to participate in the type of shared work that Dewey (1938) discusses. I intended for the ages to be similar in order to welcome reasonable

comparisons. While there is some age variability from class to class, each has at least some 5-year-old children. The classroom for my first observation had children ages 4 and 5, the second had children ages 4, 5, and 6, and the third had children ages 5 and 6. I wanted to have both public and independent schools represented, so I chose two independent schools and one public school. This study is rooted in examining the application of philosophy in classroom practice, and does not address issues related to gender, socioeconomic status, culture, and race. The intentions and hopes for my observations and interviews are discussed further in the following section.

Observing Classroom Management: What I Was Examining and Why

The evidence and markings of classroom management within a classroom can be simultaneously pervasive and elusive. Everything that occurs in the classroom is somehow linked to classroom management, and yet there are elements and styles that are difficult to describe and capture, such as the way a teacher listens intently to one of her students, the effect of a teacher's physical presence on a group of children, and the way a child's face brightens when sharing ideas with teachers and friends. Since I was visiting each classroom for only one morning, essentially capturing a snapshot of classroom life, I had to think carefully about what I was looking for, and choose which pieces of classroom management were most salient and most observable; I also had to be open to the unexpected. The eight elements of classroom management that I was specifically examining were: environment—classroom arrangement and materials; class schedule; transitions—transitional devices and frequency of transitions; group living—child-child interactions, teacher-child interactions, and teacher involvement in resolving children's conflicts; classroom tone; opportunities for discussion; opportunities for children to

choose activities and work; opportunities for shared work. These fundamentals are discussed below. At the end of this section, I also provide details about the framework for the interviews that I conducted with the three teachers.

Environment: Classroom Arrangement and Materials

Keeping in mind John Dewey (2001/1915; 2005/1916; 1938) and Lucy Sprague Mitchell's (1950) views of classroom functioning, I am taking a comprehensive view of classroom management. So, I began with the most basic element—the classroom environment. The size, shape, placement, and construction of the classroom itself may be unchangeable factors for a teacher, but are important to note. More significantly, what about the physical elements that teachers can shape and manipulate? I focused on classroom arrangement and classroom materials. How was the room set up, and what did this arrangement seem to intimate about the goings on within the classroom, even without the children in it? What materials were available to the children, and which were given the most space? Are the materials open-ended? This information would be essential in helping me gain an understanding of the classroom.

Class Schedule

It was also important to think about what the children would spend their time doing throughout the day. In the best case scenarios, teachers have input into the daily schedule, though they may have to work with a given schedule for special classes, such as Music and Gym. I noted how the day was divided in the three classes. I wanted to see if children spent a significant amount of time playing outdoors, which is essential for the physical and social development of children in this age range (Wood, 1994). Did children have a time to meet and discuss ideas in a whole group setting? Did they have a

significant period of time to work with materials in the classroom and interact with their peers? How did the demands of the schedule meld with the developmental stages of the children?

Transitions: Transitional Devices and Frequency of Transitions

The class schedule leads into another important part of any school day: transitions. I was especially curious about transitions, as I have found them to be potential tipping points, when an otherwise calm day may suddenly become unruly. Specifically, I looked at the frequency of transitions that the children experienced, and how the teachers executed these transitions.

Group Living: Child-Child Interactions, Teacher-Child Interactions, and Teacher Involvement in Resolving Children's Conflicts

Thinking about the connections between the social aspects of classroom community and classroom management that Dewey (1938) and Mitchell (1950) both put forth, I examined exchanges between children, and between students and teachers. I wanted to see how children spoke to one another, worked with one another, and cared for one another. In addition, I looked at whether children had opportunities to share their thoughts with peers and teachers individually during the day. Also, conflict, which one typically thinks of in relation to classroom management, was important to consider—not only in frequency, but more significantly, in resolution. Were teachers involved in resolving conflicts, and if so, how did they guide their students? I wondered if children were active in the process of making sense of peer conflicts and figuring out possible solutions.

Classroom Tone

The tone of a classroom, which also speaks to the notion of classroom community, can vary greatly from class to class. Perhaps the class has a quiet, calm atmosphere, or maybe a loud and energetic quality. Although challenging to put into words, I noted what kind of tone the teacher set for the classroom, and thought about how this might contribute to classroom management. In addition, did the tone of the classroom reflect the type of settings that Dewey (2001/1915) and Mitchell (1950) envisioned?

Opportunities for Discussion

I wanted to see if children were given the time and space to express themselves in discussion. Did children listen to each other, bounding and rebounding ideas off one another? I imagined that I would find a group "meeting" time in each class's schedule. However, meetings can be run in many different ways. How were children expected to contribute to these meetings, and how did they participate? Did children have the opportunity to offer their own ideas to the group?

Opportunities for Children to Choose Activities and Work

I also wanted to look at how much freedom children had to choose their own activities, keeping in mind Dewey's (1938) assertion that children's personal investment in their work, as well as their room for making choices, fosters order in the classroom. I wanted to see how and by whom decisions were made about the work children did, and if the children seemed invested.

Opportunities for Shared Work

For Dewey (1938), the realms of curriculum, community, and classroom management converge in the work that children do together. According to Dewey, when

children have the opportunity to be involved in work that is meaningful to them, especially when that work is shared with others, this act contributes to the cohesiveness of the group, and diminishes the need for teacher "discipline."

Thinking About These Elements as a Guide for My Observations

The aspects of classroom management listed above, which often overlap one another, provided me with a guide as I approached the classroom observations. I was hoping that paying attention to these elements would help illuminate the intersections between curriculum, community, and classroom management that both Dewey (1938) and Mitchell (1950) discussed.

Teacher Interviews

The teacher interviews offered me a more direct look into the teachers' thinking about classroom management. These interviews occurred after I observed in the classrooms, two on the same day as the observations, and one a week and a half later. I intended for these interviews to be as open-ended as possible, but also had questions in mind. I began with a broad question, such as "How do you think about classroom management?" or "What do you think of as classroom management?" Depending on where these answers traveled, I introduced additional questions such as: What challenges have you faced in terms of classroom management? How have your thoughts about classroom management evolved? I also asked specific background questions including "How long have you been teaching?" and "Were you in other professions before teaching?" Similar to my approach to the classroom observations, I left myself open to the unexpected.

Philosophy in Practice: Classroom Observations and Teacher Interviews

Observation 1

4/5s Class in an Independent School

March 3, 2008

Introduction to the School

My first observation was conducted in a progressive, independent school with classes for children between the ages of 3 and 14. The school has a constructivist approach to learning, where children learn through exploration, investigation, and discovery. Children are encouraged to engage deeply with materials and with the world around them, building knowledge through direct experience. All aspects of the child are thoughtfully considered and valued, including social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. The atmosphere of the school is lively, busy, and joyful. In the lower school (ages 3-6), visitors might see children fully engaged in activities from block building to dramatic play to woodworking to drawing.

The school is located on the Upper West Side of New York City, close to Morningside Heights. Being attached to a graduate school, and close to Columbia University, the school is set in a neighborhood that has a mix of college/graduate students, families, and longtime residents. This neighborhood has thriving businesses—restaurants, stores, and supermarkets—and can be an expensive neighborhood in which to live. The stores tend to be high-end, with a mix of individually-owned shops and chain stores, and the restaurants can range from affordable to expensive. The school is close to

a small, weekly farmers' market, as well as Riverside Park, both of which shape field trips and curriculum. The close proximity of such places offers children many opportunities to examine how a community works together to function.

Tuition costs approximately $28,000 to $30,000 per year, and about thirty percent of students receive financial aid. The families are predominantly upper-middle class and upper-class. Within the school, there is a range of racial, ethnic, family structure, and religious diversity, though more than half—maybe seventy to eighty percent—of the student population is white. This diversity was reflected in the 4/5s class in which I observed.

The children in the 4/5s attend school for a full day, from 8:30 a.m. until 3 p.m. There are 20 students, with a head teacher, Jane, an assistant teacher, Teresa, and very often a student teacher who is with the class three days a week. Teachers are well-supported, and can ask for additional support if needed. On the day of my observation, there were two additional teaching support staff members present at certain points in the morning. Children attend specials once a week outside the classroom, including Movement, Gym, Music, Library, and a Lower School Assembly. The music teacher also has a weekly session that takes place in the classroom. A Spanish teacher spends one work period per week with the class, and reads a story with the class once a week.

Classroom Arrangement and Materials

The classroom was a rectangular shape, and an average size by New York City standards—not too small, but not too large. It had a row of windows running the length of the room on the far side, with two glass doors that opened out onto a play deck. The windows, along with hanging plants, gave the room a bright, airy feeling.

The hallway door to the room had a vertical, narrow, rectangular window, where passersby could take a peek inside. There was a list of children's and teachers' names hung in that window, as well. Upon entering from the hallway, there was a bathroom to the left, a rectangular table straight ahead, and two rectangular tables pushed together on the right, next to counters and a sink. In the far left corner, there was a medium-sized unit block area, and next to that a small, cozy area with a rug, display bookshelves, and shelves with table and floor puzzles. A hexagon-shaped table sat in the far center, and a woodworking table at the far right. There was a large, rectangular rug, running half the length of the room to the left, between the outer wall to the bathroom and the block area, and a slightly smaller rectangular rug, running half the width of the room, on the right-hand side of the room. Next to that was a sensory table. The areas of the classroom were well-defined, and there was space for children to move between areas without crowding one another.

The bathroom had two curtained off toilet bowls, and two low sinks. Running the length of the bathroom wall, there was also a long row of hooks for coats and backpacks labeled with children's names. There were other spaces in the classroom for children's personal and school items, all labeled with their names. The cubbies for rest things were located near the meeting/dramatic play rug, and the bins for children's work were in a shelf in the center of the classroom, upon which sat a glass tank with soil, vegetation, and snails.

The largest rug doubled as a meeting space and a dramatic play area. Along the wall lining the rug, there were stacks of large, hollow, wooden blocks. On low shelves lining the other length of the rug, there were props and accessories for dramatic play such

as baby dolls, baby clothes and blankets, keyboards, telephones, bags, bowls, cups, corks, and bottle caps. There were labels with drawings and words for each item, to help facilitate cleanup. This was true throughout the room, where one could find silhouettes on the shelves in the shape of the items that belonged there, or drawn and written labels.

Materials were low to the ground, and easily accessible to children. Near the center table often used for drawing, there were shelves that contained both thin and thick crayons and pencils, white paper, recycled paper, cardboard strips, number rings, alphabet rings, name charts, tape, staplers, and scissors.

On shelves along the right-hand wall, there were bins that included manipulatives such as: small, colored plastic teddy bears, small and large wooden rods, magnetic shapes, wooden inch cubes, pattern blocks, straws and connectors, dominoes, geoboards, beads and string, small pegs and boards, and unifix cubes. There was also another shelf displaying picture books. The materials were organized and the classroom was well-kept.

Teachers Prepare for the Day: Before 8:30 a.m.

I arrived at the 4/5s class a few minutes before "Arrival," when the children would enter with their parents or caregivers. I spent time with Jane and Teresa as they prepared the classroom and themselves for the day ahead. They moved around the room setting out balls of green play dough, baskets with plastic "mosaic" pieces and their respective boards, and drawing materials. There was a floor puzzle opened on the meeting rug, and bins of colored connectors placed on the floor in the block area. The room had an orderly yet lived-in feel, and emanated a sense of warmth and welcoming. Children's large, vibrant paintings filled the bulletin boards, and their collages hung in a line along the top of the wall. However, the quiet calm of the room did not match the

feeling in the hallway—kids were practically banging down the door to get inside, knocking emphatically, and peering in through the narrow window in the doorway. They were certainly ready for their day to begin.

Children's Arrival 8:30-9:00 a.m.

As soon as the door was opened, the excitement from outside rushed in, and children and their grownups flooded the room. One child headed straight for Teresa, who was bending down, and hugged her tightly. At the drawing table, Jane momentarily sat with a group of children, smiling brightly, and greeting them individually, sometimes whispering in children's ears. After a few minutes, two boys eagerly approached Jane, with a colorful structure made from connecting rods in tow. Jane received them with a grin, and spoke with them about the structure's details. With satisfied-looking smiles, the boys carefully carried their rod structure back to where they had been working.

Both Jane and Teresa circulated around the room, connecting with families, and helping children settle in. Some parents stood and talked in small groups, and others sat with their children as they began an activity. Parents appeared to feel comfortable in the room, and children seemed to know just what to do when they entered—put their lunches on their spot on the shelf, hang their things on their hook in the bathroom, and choose an activity before they would meet as a group and head out onto deck. Many kids got right to work drawing, shaping play dough, and creating mosaic designs. The arrival process was one that the parents were quite a part of, and many stayed until the end of Arrival at 9 a.m.

Cleanup 8:55-9:00 a.m.

As Arrival was coming to a close, teachers walked around the room and quietly let children know when it was almost time to clean up. A few minutes before 9 a.m., a child moved through the different areas of the room running a wooden stick along a wooden frog's back, and creating a sound that others recognized as a signal to clean up. The children knew where items belonged in the classroom, and cleanup occurred smoothly. Teachers circulated, helping the cleanup process move forward (picking up pieces dropped on the floor, reminding children to sweep under the play dough table), though the children appeared to be fairly self-sufficient.

After a brief cleanup, everyone moved to a large rectangular rug where the morning meeting was held. Jane was sitting at the head of the rug, with her back to the wall, upon which the daily schedule, the job chart, and other important information were hung. Teresa sat at the back of the rug, and the children found spots on the edges of the rug.

Full Class Meeting 9:00-9:35 a.m.

Counting Children

Jane smiled broadly, looking around at the children, and started the meeting with a warm greeting. Then she eyed the group again, asking, "Look around, is anyone missing today?" Skyler quickly responded, "Diego is the only one missing from school because I counted." Jane asked, "Do you remember what number you counted?" and Skyler answered, "No… I forget… that number before twenty." Then, together as a class, the children counted everyone in the group in English, arriving at the number nineteen.

Following what appeared to be a class ritual, Jane and the class crossed their fingers and closed their eyes, thinking about Diego, and hoping that he would be back in school soon.

"Reading" Daily Schedule

Jane then consulted a list and called on Laura, a dark haired, blue-eyed girl to "read" aloud to the class the daily schedule, a series of drawings that represent each part of the 4/5s day. Laura used a paper towel roll that had been covered in burlap to point at each hand-drawn picture. John, with a crushed look on his face, raised his hand to share with the class that he was disappointed when Jane chose Laura to read out the schedule. Jane acknowledged and appreciated that he did not yell or disturb the group. He explained that he made a "serious face" to express his disappointment. It was obvious that this had been a piece of work for some of the children in the group—expressing disappointment without disrupting the rest of the group—and that children were internalizing some of the coaching that had come before. Most of the children seemed focused, though, typical for the age, a few were touching and poking one another. When this happened, Jane called attention back.

Reading Family Stories

Jane asked the children to move into a "story shape," a phrase which the children understood. They quickly moved to spots in the middle of the rug, getting ready to hear a story. As the children settled in, Rob, one little boy, wriggled about on the rug. Teresa said in a gentle but firm tone, "If that's going to be too hard for you, you can sit on my lap." He declined the offer, and Jane began to speak. She showed the class the book that she was about to read—a collection of their "homework" assignments. Each child had an individual page that discussed names of the people in their families and how the people in

their families take care of them. These stories were accompanied by drawings done by the children. Jane carefully explained that since there were twenty homeworks in the book, and they would not be able to read them all at once, she would read half now and half at the end of the day. Many of the children's eyes were trained on Jane as she read out the names of the children whose stories she would read. She had their full attention. In the same calm manner that she had conducted the meeting to this point, Jane stated that all the pictures would look different, have different names for the people in their families, and different things that families do. Noticing that Rob was still unsteady on the rug, Jane gently reminded him that touching people can be distracting. Teresa quietly murmured something to Rob, and touched his shoulder. Momentarily, his attention returned to the book. As Jane read each child's contribution, she asked them for pronunciations of family members' names, and the children eagerly responded. As an observer, I got the sense that the children were valued as experts here—the ones who held the knowledge about their own families. During the reading, Diego entered the room and wordlessly sat down with the group, as if he had only been in the bathroom, or just putting something away—his entrance was seamless. Jane paused in her reading to welcome him with a smile, and said, "Diego, I'm so glad you're here." When Ashley, another teacher, arrived, Jane waved and said, "Good morning, Ashley." As Jane continued reading, she noticed that one child seemed uncomfortable when her page was being read. Jane stopped and asked her if she wanted her page read now. She said that she did not want her page read, and respecting that, Jane said that they could talk about another time to read it. The tone of the meeting was quiet and respectful, and as it seemed to go on for a little bit too long, with children's interest waning, Jane acknowledged this

by saying, "I sense that there's a bit of wiggly," and closed the book to be read at a later time.

Spontaneous News-Sharing

Teresa raised her hand to say that Diego had something to share. He said excitedly, "Titi's baby came out." Jane tells the children that Titi is Diego's aunt, and that she was pregnant. Children begin to raise their hands, and one girl shared that her aunt is having a baby, too, but it is still small. "It's still growing in her uterus." It turns out that this aunt is having twins. Another child, Lily, who is a twin herself, said that she does not like her twin brother. Jane calmly turned the conversation back to Diego's new cousin.

Sensing that children, who have been sitting on the rug for at least half an hour, are more than ready to get out onto deck, Jane demonstrated ways in which children could move their bodies; she showed them how to squeeze their hands together tight and make circles with their thumbs. Two children who have the attendance job leave the rug to fill out the attendance paper. They appear to naturally divide the task between each other, and put an X in a box above each child's name who was in class that day.

Transition to Outdoor Play Time on Deck 9:35-9:40 a.m.

Jane began calling children one by one to go get their coats from the coat hooks in the bathroom. She also assigned each child a specific area to put on her/his outerwear. Teresa left the rug area to assist children in this task, and Ashley stood beside the bathroom doorway, regulating the flow of children in and out. Children were spread out around the classroom as they got dressed. This allowed them to have personal space, and to avoid bumping into others with their coats as they swung them into place on their bodies. As children got ready, Jane reminded them, "You can ask a friend to help you zip

up." Both teachers and children helped those who were still learning to use a zipper. When several children were appropriately clad in their warm clothing, Jane opened the glass door at the back of the classroom that opens out onto a play deck, and took the group outside. Teresa and Ashley remained inside to help the remainder of the class get ready.

Play Deck 9:40-10:30 a.m.

Running Game

On this morning, both 4/5s classes shared the deck space. Jane went to one end of the deck which has open space, with tires and hollow blocks stacked along one wall. Jane helped the children set up a game of "Teddy Bear Tag," and facilitated by reminding children of the rules. A group of girls were playing, and they smiled broadly and clapped their hands in excitement. Jane informed children in a matter-of-fact manner that they could choose their activity on deck, but that if they wanted to run, their option was to play this tag game at the open end of the deck. Jane called to the children in the game, "Let's go back to the edge. Let me see if another person is ready to be a tagger." With two "taggers" in place, Jane said, "Let's start off by counting backwards." She proceeded to count, and the children did not join in, but started off as soon as she counted down to one. Jane quietly watched the game, smiling serenely.

Deck Layout

The play deck was in the shape of a long, narrow rectangle—the length of about four classrooms, and the width of a classroom and a half. The deck had a large climber with a long, twisty slide, two small slides, monkey bars, swinging rings, small slides, and parallel bars on an incline. Alongside a long brick wall, hollow blocks were stacked in

piles five high, and a large wooden box contained long and short wooden boards. There were also large wooden boxes, two large enough to fit two or three children, and one large enough for about four or five. In addition to these materials, there were large and small metal triangles for children to climb on, build with, or use as props in dramatic play. On the expanse of deck, children appeared to choose freely to play tag, build, or test their bodies by ascending and descending the climber. It seemed like children from both classes knew one another, and comfortably engaged in play together. Many of the small groups who were working together seemed to divide along gender lines—all boys or all girls. It was a lively time, and the deck was filled with the joyful, and sometimes not-so-joyful, sounds of children playing, and calling teachers and friends over to see their structures.

Social Negotiations

In the same area where children had been playing tag, a group of five boys built structures with hollow blocks along the wall. Jane approached the group with Diego at her side. She knelt down and said in a concerned tone, "There's a problem. Diego says you're trying to shoot him."

One boy piped up, "We're not shooting him. This is the spaceship; these are the cannons," as he swept his hand across a board on top of a pile of hollow blocks. Their structure had a place for people to sit.

Jane replied, "Diego felt shot at. How can we fix this?"

"We weren't shooting him!" rebuked the same boy.

Jane suggested that they turn their cannons toward the brick wall. Together, Jane and Eli brainstormed about the problem further, and presented the idea that the group

could warn passersby before they walk in front of the cannon. Three of the boys continued to play, and shout warnings to others as their spaceship hurtled through space. "Flying, shooting spaceship coming through! Get out of the way princesses! Jack, get out of the way—spaceship coming through!" Diego decided not to play with them, and seeming satisfied with the solution, slowly walked to the other end of the deck.

Other children approached Jane to chat while this discussion was taking place, and she managed to briefly acknowledge their needs, while keeping her attention on the problem-solving at hand. Jane, Diego, and the boys spoke earnestly, and Jane appeared to be genuinely invested in helping the children find a way to coexist on deck in a way that felt safe to everyone involved.

Dramatic Play

Closer to the climber, a group of five girls were busy building an elaborate structure and pretending to be babies. They made places to sit and lay down. One girl alternated between groaning and pretend-crying as she ascended the climber and then crawled back to the building.

"She's sick!" exclaimed another in the group.

A curly-haired girl directed her friend, "Tanya, sit here." Tanya followed the instructions, and concluded, "I need it bigger."

The curly-haired child continued, "If you want it bigger, you have to be a babysitter." Tanya added more blocks.

The "sick" child continued to cry as she sat in the back of the structure. Jane stopped beside her and exclaimed, "Emma, you did it!" With arms outstretched and a broad grin, Jane said, "Baby crying in the back of the car…I've had that happen to me."

The curly-haired director stated, "Let's go to the doctor."

Many other children were also building with hollow blocks—working on low structures, tall, skinny ones, tables made with planks, and obstacle courses. Jane made her way to different parts of the deck, pausing to look at the work children were doing, and waiting to listen as children explained for themselves. "This is the battery tank," a boy told Jane, pointing at one of the blocks in his building, and Jane bent down to look more closely. Making her way back to the "spaceship," Jane helped the group of builders, who were arguing with one another, devise a plan to take turns being the "driver."

Five-Minute Warning

Then, Jane moved back to the middle of the deck and said loudly and firmly, intended for all to hear, "Five! Four! Three! Two! One! There are five more minutes left to play!" Another teacher chimed in to reiterate when it was apparent that not everyone heard the five-minute warning. Jane then returned to the spaceship to let the driver know that it was time to switch, and the handoff to the new driver went smoothly.

Play Deck Cleanup 10:25-10:30 a.m.

Five minutes later, Jane announced, "4s and 5s, five! Four! Three! Two! One! The climber is closed and it's time to clean up."

The boys at the spaceship immediately started cleaning up. "This will be fast—I think we have the smallest structure," one boy says to another as they work together to carry a long block to the wall.

Another boy walked over and said plaintively, "We hate clean up time."

When children appeared to be stalling or avoiding cleaning up, Jane asked children questions like, "Which block are you putting away?" She also requested that children check the deck to see if there was more to clean up.

Transition from Play Deck to Snack 10:30-10:35 a.m.

As children finished cleaning, around 10:30, Jane gathered them on the ledge and began a rendition of "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" changing up the order of the body parts. When all the children were on the ledge, Jane explained what was going to happen next, and began calling children two at a time to run around the climber and walk into the classroom. When some children forgot and began to climb on the climber, Jane gently reminded them to run around it.

Inside, Teresa reminded children to take off their coats in the block area or rug area before hanging them up. The speed with which kids shed their coats, hung them up, and washed their hands to get ready for snack was striking. Children did not have assigned seats for snack—they chose their seats with the stipulation that they make sure that there are some boys and some girls at each table. Two children had set up snack during deck time, so it was ready and waiting for children when they sat down.

Snack 10:35-10:45a.m.

There were three tables for children to sit at: a rectangle table with six seats, a hexagonal table with six seats, and a table made from two pushed together with eight seats. Kids took ownership over their food serving and consumption—pouring juice for themselves, and taking bananas and crackers. The room swelled with the sounds of their chatting voices. I overheard one little girl say in a worried tone, "Guys, there's only a little bit of juice left for Elli."

Transition from Snack to Worktime Meeting 10:45-10:50 a.m.

As snack ended, some children checked the job chart, which was hung low, above a display bookshelf, in a place where children could view it easily. The chart was horizontal, with a small photo of each child, along with the child's name in small font. When a child had a job, there was a photo representation of that job hung above the child's picture and name. I found Elli taking care of the class pets: snails. As she sprayed the snails with water, she cooed, "Wake up snails." Laura was also spraying the snails, and I asked her why she was giving them water. She responded candidly, "Because it's the job my teacher said to do." When I questioned her further, she said that she was "giving the snails rain."

Children began to finish snack and throw out their garbage. Many meandered over to the meeting rug to quietly look through books. Two children wiped down the tables with sponges and dried them with paper towels, while another swept under the tables using a small broom and dustpan.

When nearly all the children were settled on the rug, Jane sang, "4s, 5s, books away," and children closed the books and placed them on the display shelves.

Full Group Worktime Meeting 10:50-11:15 a.m.

Jane began singing another song, with lyrics about unit blocks: "We have squares on the shelf. We have rectangles on the shelf," and so on, with children offering the names of other blocks. Looking at a book with the names of each type of block, Jane and Teresa pointed out the "flat quad." Ashley brought a "quad" and a "flat quad" to the rug, and Jane asked children to describe them. Children were eager to make comment such as, "That one's smaller," and "That one's bigger." Lily, the outspoken twin, called out,

"When that one's down it might be the same size," and Jane responded, "Lily, you're calling out right now." A minute later, Lily raised her hand, and Jane called on her. When certain children appeared to be getting antsy at meeting, Jane reminded them that they could do "sitting pushups." Later, Jane also had children stretch to reach their toes and walk their hands back toward their bodies. In this gentle, clear, and understanding manner, Jane kept order at the meeting.

Jane revealed photos of block structures, and informed the children, "Today we're going to have a block share." Anna, a little girl with a head full of blonde and brown curls began, slowly bringing her photo around for her classmates to see. Then she sat up front with Jane, and called on children who had questions. One child asked how she was able to get the "X" block to balance on the other blocks. Anna talked about how she used the other blocks around it. Teresa restated her idea, "You used other blocks to support it."

Jane called on Luke to tell kids about his structure. "It's an airport." Jane pointed to the photo, "What part of the airport is this?" Luke responded, "Binoculars so planes can see where they're going," and "a sign that says no drinks on the plane." When calling on children to ask questions, Jane reminded Luke to alternate calling on boys and girls. The meeting was very interactive, with many small, energetic hands popping up to ask questions of their peers.

Transition to Worktime 11:15-11:20 a.m.

It was about 11:15. "Raise your hand if you are ready to build and want to be in the block area," Jane stated, and four children called out in response. Teresa called four children to work on their self-portraits. Three girls and two boys were on the list for dramatic play. The rest of the class raised their hands to use materials like sand, clay,

drawing materials, and manipulatives. There was a mixture of free choice and assignment for worktime activities.

Worktime 11:20 a.m.-12 p.m.

Surveying the room, children seemed engaged in the activities chosen or assigned to them; no one appeared to be lost or bored. Children were industrious in their work. In the dramatic play area, an adult (Lisa, who comes in to provide additional teacher support in the classroom) was facilitating children's discussion as they worked together to make a plan for their play. The two boys decided to be dogs, in what seemed to be a veterinary office. The group quickly went to work building a structure out of large, wooden hollow blocks. They also incorporated accessories that were available to them on the low shelves that bordered the rug—beautiful wooden bowls, corks, and bottle caps. Children turned these open-ended materials into props for dramatic play. One boy filled a bowl with caps and bottle caps, pretending it was dog food. With a sense of ease and ownership in the classroom, some of the girls went over to the drawing supplies, and gathered paper and crayons to use in their play scenario.

Glancing over at the unit block area, four distinct structures had already been erected. Each child had a space marked off with tape in which to build. A bang echoed in the room as one of the buildings tumbled down, and I looked up to see a startled look on the face of the builder. Jane knelt beside him and asked quietly, "Do you want some help?" He nodded. "Why don't I stack these?" she said as she began to make small piles of rectangular blocks.

While Jane helped the boy organize his blocks so that he could rebuild, four children at a small circular table nearby were working using small, plastic mosaic pieces

to create patterns and designs on individual mats. Children popped the pieces into holes on the mat. One girl was occupied by storytelling, spinning her mosaic mat on the table, smiling from ear-to-ear, and gesticulating to her peers as she narrated. This story went on for some time, and others at the table were losing patience. Another child groaned, "When is this story going to end? I'm tired of listening to this big, long, stinky story." One of the boys at the table chimed in, "Stinky potato," and another asserted, "The orange potato story is much better." Undeterred, and continuing to smile, the storyteller forged ahead, even after another child complained, "It's giving me a headache," and it was clear that her peers had ceased to pay attention. As these exchanges occurred, two of the children worked on mosaics that were very similar, with colorful borders and a large X through the middle.

Back in the unit block area, Rob had bumped into another child's structure, knocking it to the ground. Jane stated, "Let's help clean this up." She spoke comforting words to the builder: "It balanced for such a long time, and now it seems a little tricky."

In another part of the room, Teresa walked with Skyler and Mona over to the woodworking table. Both children experienced difficulty hammering their nails in straight, and Teresa said encouragingly, "You can help each other figure this out." Skyler laughed as Mona shouted, "Yes, sir!" Mona tilted back her mane of long, curly blonde hair, and burst out with a small giggle, but then went back to work, hammering a nail through a metal cap, attaching it to a piece of wood. Teresa offered Skyler another block of wood for support beneath her piece of wood, which was accepted. Then Teresa demonstrated how Skyler could straighten out her crooked nail using the back of a hammer. "Teresa, I'm gonna try that," Skyler twittered, and pulled out her crooked nail.

Jane quickly flicked the classroom lights and stated clearly, "We have five more minutes left to play." Then she stopped to remind a child at the sand table, who had been building with unit blocks, that she still had a few more blocks to put away. When children decided to move to another area completely, they were expected to clean their spot first. The girl brushed off her hands and asked the girl next to her if she would save something in the sand table for her until she returned. "Come on, bury the dinosaur bones," a boy said, and then the two boys and one girl began frantically burying seashells. After a few moments, he exclaimed, "I found a dinosaur skull!" holding up a shell. Showing his friends the rocks and shells he was finding, he shouted, "Another one!" In addition to the stones and seashells, there were also cups available for children to add water to the sand.

Worktime Cleanup 11:55 a.m.-12 p.m.

On the rug area near the sand table, predominantly used for manipulative work, Rob and another little boy were using the same colored rods that they using during Arrival. They were working together to build an ever-growing, patterned, symmetrical structure. As they continued to build, a child walked nearby, making a sound on a wooden frog, again signaling that it was time to clean up. Ashley, anticipating that the boys were going to want to save their work, helped them find a space on the shelf for their long structure, and begin to put things away.

Children started to clean up the areas in which they had been working. For some children, it was not easy to stop playing. Jane approached a few children who were playing with the drawing supplies, asking them pointedly where they were going to clean. The dramatic play area took the longest to organize—putting the big blocks and accessories away in their places. There was an order to the process: accessories first and

hollow blocks last. At one point, there were eight children and two teachers cleaning in this area. The taped silhouettes of the big blocks seemed to help children find the places for these materials. The drawing supplies brought to that area earlier proved to be difficult to clean up, and Jane said that they would have to talk about whether or not those belonged in the dramatic play area. As the room approached its original state of order, teachers checked in with one another to make sure that they were finished cleaning and were ready for lunch.

Lunch 12:00 p.m.

After children washed their hands and gathered their individual lunchboxes, working like a well-oiled machine, they chose their seats for lunch. Like seating during snack, there were three tables, and each table had to have both boys and girls. The children seemed quite aware of this seating arrangement, and one child concluded, "There's too much girls." Teresa responded, "No, I think it's just right. How many boys and girls are there?" The children looked around the table and counted four of each.

Ashley and Teresa stayed in the room for lunch, sitting at tables with the children, while Jane left for a meeting. At the hexagon table, children discussed their lunches, showing one another their fruit and bagels. If someone had trouble opening a container in their lunch, teachers suggested asking a friend for help, and children worked well together. Teresa noticed that one child was teasing another at one of the tables, and she sat down with them, talking about teasing in a very matter-of-fact manner. She spoke with the children about how being teased might make a person feel. Overall, it was a relatively quiet time, as children unpacked their lunches, ate, and chatted. The group had

a cohesive and comfortable feeling. I left the classroom, and their cozy lunching, at a few minutes after noon.

Interview 1

Interview with Jane, 4/5s Teacher in an Independent School

March 14, 2008

Jessica Anzelone: *How do you think about classroom management, and in line with that, what do you see as the basis for classroom management in your class?*

Jane: I think that one of the things that I learned this year, that surprised me, is that classroom management isn't only one thing. It's that it exists in so many different contexts and so many different expressions, in so many different moments and places and times within the day that it really does permeate the day, and you could probably pick any moment and any time and pick out the classroom management that was going on. And I think maybe one example of what I mean is you can look at a schedule, and a schedule, say, that is really responsive to children's physical needs—that's a form of classroom management because if your schedule matches their physical needs, then they'll be able to have much more self-regulation. You're really allowing them the best possible opportunity to regulate themselves. I think that would be a sort of global piece almost. And I think coming into this position as a head teacher for the first time, I really thought of more like, how will you help kids at meeting time? What if kids are having behaviors at meeting time that disrupt the group? So it was very narrow I think coming in, but having been here and having lived through it I see it in so many different places. So, your schedule might be one place; your room set-up is another place, so that would be both: How is it physically comfortable for the children? Does it make *sense* with how they work? And again, you're providing the best of all possible scenarios for their

success at regulating themselves. And I think that's actually the crux of it, now that I'm saying this out loud, is that in the end, it's *self*-management that you're trying to promote. And, it's autonomy that you're trying to promote. It's confidence that you're trying to promote and help them develop into. And if you're allowing children to achieve that then it's not so much the teacher saying, you know, "Sit down and be quiet," or "It's not time for that." You're really allowing it to grow out of the children and having them take on tools to manage themselves. And I think with 4s and 5s, that being said, so much of what we do as teachers is set limits and have clear expectations and hold children accountable for their actions in the classroom and have them reflect on their actions in the classroom—both how it affects themselves and how it affects others as a community. Building community is a big part, again, of management; it's there, too. So again, every time I pick a new subject it's like there's classroom management in that in some form. You know, and if your group is a cohesive group and you really help them feel safe and comfortable both physically and emotionally, that's a form of classroom management, too. So, I guess that it's so big and so layered and you can find it if you identify any moment in the classroom; you probably find that piece. And then, then there's all the smaller things. I sometimes think because I was a dancer for many years, I think about my physical presence as a teacher. With this group at this point, I know that my approach to them, or a look from me, will serve as a message about self regulation that they will get, and sometimes, by this point in the year, many children will sort of fix what they're doing if it's a disruptive behavior… with simply almost a physical signal; it's not a verbal signal.

JA: *What are some of the classroom management difficulties that come up sometimes, or have come up?*

Jane: I think transitions. Always in a day, anytime that your group is moving from one thing to the next, for young children this is always… change is just always hard on some level. So building predictability in is one way to sort of counteract change, but even the most predictable schedule, you still have to move from worktime to lunch (laughs), and so working on those routines, and making those routines clear and consistent again, coming back to that. They really know and learn and are taught and I think, this is something I feel, I've come to feel very strongly about this year, is that it is *our* job as teachers to provide external structures… like the steps of a routine—that really is what we do now—and the children begin over time to internalize those. And some of it, I struggle with this, because you always want many things to be coming from the children, but they're little, and those teachers providing external structures enables the children to internalize them and make them their own. It's socialization, I mean many of these things they're gonna grow to learn and practice. But if you take a transition like going from worktime to lunch, I watch my group that has learned this year that we *really* expect everyone to clean up everywhere before they move on. So, yeah you were painting and you weren't doing blockbuilding but if they're still working in blockbuilding, it's your group, and you go over and see if you can help. You look at how the shelves are laid out to make cleanup easier and more autonomous. They do know where things go because there are labels that help them know that, so there's an external structure there and an expectation that's visual and it's very clear. And, again it sends them the message that things in this classroom have a place and they're responsible for putting them there, and

they can because we've made it at their height and they're physically capable. And, then knowing that, just moving themselves on from that is a time to wash my hands, remembering, you know, wash my hands. All those multi-step transitions are very hard. Ah, so there are a lot of reminders about staying steady, and "I see your body is getting really excited now," and that's another part—narrating back to them what you're seeing. And I actually think children hearing the stories of themselves, even if it's that moment to moment story, like "I can see, it looks to me like, you're feeling sad or angry or you're moving fast or," really helps them know themselves and what's happening, and in a sense then fix that if it's disruptive or challenging to themselves or the group.

I'm trying to think of any major challenges. Transitions I think is a huge one. Sometimes I think it's times of the year, like we'll find those times of year that are just incredibly high energy and there is a point when you're looking around, and I think, oh, this must be because it's that moment of language acquisition; all of a sudden they've learned ten thousand new words and how to use them. People were just chatting, chatting, chatting, chatting, chatting and in each other's face and kind of arguing, too, and it was kind of hot in here. And, just seeing your group suddenly explode in some way, and you think, okay, how do we do this? Often here which I appreciate so much, we will have a group conversation about that, because it's about us and how can we problem solve about this—a lot of people feel kind of hot under the collar. Having them talk about, really reflect, self-reflection, helping oneself and what would help us, as a group. Those have been very powerful meetings. And teachers really being very clear about the things that are and are not okay. And when the bottom line is emotional safety and physical safety, those are the bottom lines, and there is *no* wiggle room there. You know things cannot

happen, and of course they do, because children and people make mistakes, and I actually try and talk about that. I use that word, about *mistaken* behavior as a way of saving face to some extent but also really because we're practicing, and things don't happen right away and you practice again and again and a little bit of time, you'll remember. Then all the noticing, the positive noticing, "Huh! You remembered this time." And they start doing that with each other, like they've been learning to not make big disappointed noises when they don't get picked. Often the group now will say, "Oh yeah, Teresa, you know, nobody made a noise about it this time. Huh, we learned that," that you *can* be disappointed inside and not make a disruptive noise. I think they're very proud. It's all about growing up.

JA: *In my observation, during the beginning meeting, one child pointed out to you, "I was really disappointed when you chose Laura to read the schedule," and then he said, "I made a serious face."*

Jane: That was Jay. I remember that. That's because this is a place you can show your emotions at the same time, and I think that's actually a really interesting thing about being at school, because the expectations here and the demands are *huge*, and so you think about what we're asking them to do in terms of self-regulation.

JA: *I noticed that that was something that was happening in your class.*

Jane: It's like an interchange. I don't ever want classroom management with the teacher saying, "Don't do this and don't do that," you know and very top down. I think it's more directive—and maybe I'll grow to a place where I don't feel it's so directive, as much as democratic—in a way, like coming from the children making their own rules, but 4s and 5s are very young, and there really is a place for a teacher to just say it. And just name

things. This has been so powerful this year, naming those things you see, and having them all be points of learning. And the kids in this classroom *really* know, "I see you're really working on figuring out how to be friends right now. You know, sometimes you don't want to play with someone, and we're thinking about feelings," and you know that really again is that narration of it, and naming things. "Gosh, it feels really hard to be left out." And friends see that, and know it for themselves, and it's knowing they're all going to be taken care of, when they have that need and they feel sad and they feel angry and they feel left out.

JA: *It sounds like it's coming back to community.*

Jane: Yeah, that jumped into my head, too. Community building is, and I hate using that word actually because it made it sound like such a package—it's not. But, growing as a group and growing into being a group and knowing how to be a group, and all the things you need to know about group living and social skills and all of that plays into one's ability to manage the classroom. My guess is that you might have fewer areas where you feel that this is really hard and they're out of control and it's chaotic, if you have a group that's more gelled. I think you'd have potentially less chaos, that the children really are feeling that they—it's almost like we ask them to care for the classroom, we ask them to care for each other.

JA: *I feel like this is all intertwined, and I see it in that way too, that everything just connects. How do you see curriculum in connection with classroom management, or do you?*

Jane: I always think back to Dewey, wondering how much I really understood the whole thing about social control. I think a couple of things, and one is that I am so committed to

the idea that for 4 and 5-year-olds, the social-emotional curriculum is our curriculum, that and our materials curriculum. So that being said, when we're at work at those, you can see, we've already really been talking about the social-emotional curriculum. That's so clearly connected, to building community, to feeling safe emotionally and physically. So that piece I think we've already really talked about, and that is curriculum. And I think if you want 4 and 5-year-olds to leave with anything from your room, that's what you want. You want them to be able to be independent—not exactly independent because they're going to be interdependent and collaborative learners, but they need this sense that they can take on work and be great community members and be friends and know how to be friends and how to support themselves and their group. I think this is what you bring with you to the 5/6s. Materials being another really significant strand. Yeah, we have materials in the classroom, but we're invested in the materials, like *how* do you talk about materials. You don't just go build with blocks, but it's knowing that their teachers and then they themselves value this as important, real work, so you take care of your materials. We've already talked about that piece. You work with them, you share what you've done with friends so that you keep on bringing out, "What amazing work and thinking you're doing with this," really validating that work in the classroom. We do a lot of work shares these days where children give compliments and ask questions and ask how kids made it. We talk a lot about how you do that. That makes me think about how is that connected with classroom management, but now it's sort of coming to me, because if you have one of those really busy worktimes when children are excited to go work with materials, if they're using some of those energies that can get frenetic and silly, if they're invested in their work, your most frenetic and silly child will often have, unless there are

other issues going on, the most productive, focused worktime. How many times do I write in a report, so-and-so can get silly during transitions or find those challenging, but at work in the blocks, you find that the body settled down, their minds and bodies are engaged in very productive work. So, I think you could say that, as a connection with classroom management, what you offer in terms of materials can ground children and that you expect them to get grounded, that it's busy working time, and it doesn't mean it's not socializing time because they always learn in a social context, and it's collaborative. We have amazing collaborative work recently. When children really engage with what they do, self-regulation is *much* easier for them. Lots of times, the children who have trouble with the moment, I think of one child in particular, but we have more than one and that's typical, will say, "I'm bored," and their bodies are. You can tell their bodies are kind of racing and wanting to go somewhere so, it's interesting that it's their interpretation of "I'm bored," like "my mind isn't engaged." And if you take that one step further out into curriculum, other things that we think about and work with are the ideas of family, for instance, or, typically for the 4/5s, family and then babies in the context of families, and self. Those meetings where you're having curriculum discussion basically, so it might be about a self-portrait they've made, and they're right there—their attention is so right there, because you have them where they live. I think curriculum does that, has an interplay with classroom management, because if they are right there, you think of a child painting a painting about their family, for instance, that moment is just total for that child, engaged and it's all right there. It's really right where they are, and if you can locate that curriculum for your group, like what's right there for 4 and 5-year-olds, and that's your curriculum... I think that for instance, also, nature, like creatures and outdoors, and the

wonder of all of that, and the noticing is just what they can do and are interested in doing, so that connection there, that's classroom management, as well, because kids go to that moment and are focused and engaged and busy and productive, and then less likely to feel scattered and silly.

JA: *Classroom management is everywhere, and it's so complex.*

Jane: It's so complex because it really is everywhere. And then you have those moments, like I look around sometimes and I think, what am I supposed to do right now, when you find those waves, like there's a wave of silliness, and then it grows in the group, and all of a sudden—so what's that tool for that moment? When it really looks like there's a battle here? I felt that on the rug today, and I'm thinking, it's late in the day. We had someone come and cook. They're very excited about lunch, and yeah, it's really hard to sit here right now. Just having to deal with those moments, sometimes I really wish I had more tools in my back pocket...for those moments when it's like, how do I get this, reel this group back, you know, from the edge, so they don't go over the edge of silliness? There are all sorts of techniques that you use sometimes, say, that you have if you're in meeting, and one kid really can't be steady, sending them to have a seat *outside* the meeting, you know does that work for your group? I think it works for some and not for others. We did it a little bit; we don't really do it right now, but it is a *very* steady group. Always matching what you do to where they are, and then you'll have those times, like oh wow, this meeting was just way too long, and that's too hard for them. That's not fair basically, to ask them to do something that they can't do. You know how hard they have to work to regulate themselves, all day, in every little thing that have to do here...it's tiring.

JA: *How many years have you been teaching?*

Jane: Not that long. I had one year as a part-time teacher of two-year-olds, it was a two-year-old program, and I was there two days a week. It was very short, it was two hours, two days a week, but I was a head teacher, and I had an assistant. That was very exciting—it was a great year. I did that for a year. After that, I had my year as a student teacher, and so I had three placements: public school kindergarten, public school first/second grade class, and then here in the 4/5s. Then the third year of teaching I was as an assistant teacher in the same 4/5s classroom, and then this year as a head teacher, so now four. But, also, I am a mom. There's actually a lot that comes from that, from being a mom.

JA: *Weren't you also a dancer and a dance critic?*

Jane: I was a dancer, a choreographer, and a dance critic, and then during that time, because none of those professions makes any money, I freelanced in publishing, particularly children's book publishing, so it was right up my alley. I did all of those things for about ten years, and then took time off to be a mom at home, and then went back to graduate school when my older daughter was in kindergarten.

JA: *You also mentioned earlier that you feel that your years of being a dancer influence your physical presence as a teacher.*

Jane: I think in surprising ways, too, I mean there's the sense that teaching is improvisation, and you really need to be in interplay with your moment! I'm a very controlling person, too, so that's always an interesting piece for me. You make this great map of your day, then knowing that within that map there's that improvisational interplay with every moment, with every need, with every event, who knows what the stars'

alignment and all of that. I think because I did, literally, a lot of improvisation as a dancer, I feel that strongly. How do you do an intake for the moment? And then, physical presence is another piece, just how you use that, and I love to move around with them. I'm not teaching them to dance. We're not focusing on dancing, but I love the whole visual-kinesthetic aspect of working with very young children. So if you're talking about trees, and all of a sudden, you just make a tree with your hands, you really get your body involved in what you're doing. I think it really unlocks a lot for them, of taking in information and feeling that they can attend that moment because they're actually moving their bodies, too. We're talking about seeds, and it's just very easy to start that discussion by being a seed and sitting, not just to help them with their bodies, but how can you think about this. We did all this stuff about winter trees, so they took photographs and then they did observational drawings. And then we worked with Karen (movement teacher) to make tree shapes with our bodies. It's all those levels, and I feel like I can draw on that, and even lots of mime—talk about being able to control a moment. If you shut off your own voice, and you start using mime, very often the children will shut their own voices off, and like, just totally get into doing what you're miming, and either doing what you're doing or knowing that it's a message you're giving them, but it's without words. They think it's funny—humor! Another big part of classroom management, and compassion. Those things that turn the moment—sometimes from being this meltdown disaster, to being something else. Sometimes even one compassionate word, "Ah, that must have really hurt," or whatever it is, I think the child feels known in that moment, and then can deal with whatever else.

JA: *Well, is there anything more that you would want to add?*

Jane: I was glad to say the piece about, just thinking about structure, and being directive or not, that was a big part of growth for me this year, knowing what was in a progressive context, is okay and is not okay for teachers to do. That that was a big thing to think about, and I think that I am more directive in many instances than I thought I would have been, and in some ways that works for a group, and actually opens up for them because if they're safe, they know what they know, and they know the parameters, that within those parameters, there's so much room for being creative and having their own voices. But they need—they so need—structures that are basically set from outside themselves, and they can fit themselves into it and still have so much of their own improvisation.

Observation 2

Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten Class in a Public School

May 7, 2008

Introduction to the School

For my second observation, I visited a public school located in the East Village in Manhattan, consisting of thirteen multi-age classes ranging from pre-K (age 4) through 5th grade (age 10). Although it is a public school, families must apply for entrance, with priority given to those living in the school district and siblings of current students. The school was founded in part to meet the need for a progressive educational setting in the community, placing a lot of emphasis on experiential learning, and seeking to meet both the emotional and academic needs of children. Situated in a neighborhood with a diverse resident population, as well as a strong NYU student presence, the school itself has an ethnically diverse population of students. Exploring the surrounding neighborhood and city is also an important part of much of the school's curriculum. Among the predominantly low-rise buildings, apartments sit above a mix of chic boutiques, mom-and-pop stores, and restaurants, and the area is known for its nightlife, art, and culture. In addition to Tompkins Square Park, there are also many community gardens in the area. Right in front of the school building, the school has devoted significant space to an extensive school garden, with rows of large, wooden planters. This is an active garden that classes use to grow flowers and vegetables. This seems to fuel curriculum for some of the classes. Children also have physical education and Spanish classes in their schedules.

I conducted this observation in a multi-age class made up of half pre-kindergarten students and half kindergarten students, ages 4-6. In this setting, the pre-k students stay on for a second year in the same classroom. Children attend school for a full day, from 8:25 a.m. until 2:50 p.m. In the pre-k/K class, there is a Head Teacher, an Assistant Teacher, and a Student Teacher when available. In this class, there were 18 students, and about one third of the students spoke languages other than English at home, including Spanish, French, Gujarati, Hindi, Arabic, Japanese, and Cantonese. In addition to the Head Teacher, Ali, and the Assistant Teacher, Charlene, there was also a paraprofessional, Francesca, who worked to support an individual child. On the day that I visited, those three adults and seventeen students were present.

Classroom Arrangement and Materials

The classroom space was striking. A large corner room, windows extended from the high ceilings to the base heater on two walls, washing the room in bright, natural light. In addition to a sensory table and a woodworking table, five wooden tables, used for a variety of purposes, were spread out near the entrance of the room. Low shelves with writing and drawing materials bordered the rectangular tables, and display bookshelves lined the meeting area. Beyond all of this, a climber was the central focal point of the space, dividing the block area on the right from the meeting rug on the left. The block area shared a border with a dress-up area.

The room included a bathroom with a toilet and sink that were at the appropriate heights for a young child. There was another sink on the counter used for cooking supplies, including a toaster oven and a hotplate in plain view. The classroom had a small

refrigerator and many shelves with cooking utensils, which displayed labels drawn and written by the children, things like "baking pans" and "measuring cups."

The classroom had a lived-in feel; it was clear that items had their place, but there was a slightly disheveled look. The message was: children played here. On the walls, children's paintings hung by clips, with the children's names above their work. Children's line drawings and patterned designs also adorned the walls. Their work was prominent in the aesthetic of the classroom.

Arrival 8:25-8:40 a.m.

Smiling children and their respective parents and caretakers entered the room. Many parents sat with their children for a few minutes before leaving. The atmosphere felt comfortable, laid-back, and intimate; families chatted as if they knew each other well. On one rectangular table lay a set of well-worn wooden dominoes. Two tables held art supplies—one with pieces of cardboard and markers, and another with paper, markers, and stamps. A bin of legos was set out on one table, and on the circular table, there were science books. Children immediately got to work with these materials—some drawing with intense focus, others quickly constructing buildings out of legos.

At the table with the dominoes, one child began to cry because he only had three dominoes. Across the table, a little boy had most of the dominoes laid out in front of him. Charlene approached the table to find out what was happening. Listening to the child and looking around at the others, she suggested that they count how many dominoes each child had. She began to count, and the child with the most began quietly putting some of his pile back into the bin. Then there was enough for everyone at the table to be able to use the dominoes, and the group seemed satisfied.

Most parents cleared the room within fifteen minutes, and Ali announced, "Two minutes until clean-up."

Cleanup 8:40-8:45 a.m.

A few minutes later, Ali confirmed, "Everybody needs to start cleaning up and coming over to the rug." The 16 children present continued to work until the assistant and the paraprofessional began to clear the tables and shepherd them to the rug.

As children gathered in the meeting area, a small rectangular rug, Ali chatted with a few remaining parents on the periphery. Children settled into spots around the edges of the rug, and three boys crowded around the glass tank nearby.

Full Class Meeting 8:45-9:05 a.m.

Ali sat on a stool at the front of the rug. A petite white woman in her forties, she wore simple jeans and a white, short-sleeved cotton blouse—comfortable yet fashionable. She had a head full of curly, dark blond hair, which reached the base of her neck, and bright blue eyes. She began the meeting by saying, "Get your monsters out. What language are they gonna sing in?" Her question was met by silence, and then children offered up Spanish, Japanese, French, and English as options, deciding upon English. Children used one hand to say, "Hello, how are you," and the other to say "Fine!" in a gruff, monster voice, which they all seemed to find amusing. There was a vertical schedule, one rectangular piece of paper above another, reading, with accompanying drawings: meeting; activity time; clean up; story; snack; outside; lunch; rest; math/ español. The children "read" the schedule along with Ali. Throughout, Ali provided quiet reminders to children, such as, "Shoes should be quiet." In a matter-of-fact manner, she asked children who were chatting to move away from one another. Then she started a

discussion about the snack that they would be having that day—hardboiled eggs. Asking each child individually if she or he wanted a hardboiled egg for snack, she marked off numbers on a large chart for every child who wanted an egg. One girl had been sitting on the floor next to the rug, and Ali reminded, "I can't ask you until you're in the circle." Quietly, the child moved onto the rug. Sandra, a 4-year-old girl who was distracted since the start of meeting, turning to tell me at one point that I look like the yellow Power Ranger, was told, "Sandy, I can't ask you until you're at the edge," and she quickly scuttled to her spot.

The majority of the children were sitting at full attention, watching Ali eagerly as she carried a large pot full of water over to the rug, and filled it with eggs. Children peered inside the pot as Ali showed it around the rug. This made one child think about milk, and she told her friend about getting fresh milk from the farmers' market.

Making Choices for Activity Time

Then, the group discussed the choices available for activity time, and Ali asked children to make choices. She wanted to know what the group thought about the blockbuilding that had been left up in the unit block area, wondering if they were still interested in working on it; a boy spoke up to say that he still wanted to build on it. Then Ali turned to Charlene and asked her if she would take children to the library. On a large, over-sized writing pad, Ali used markers to write the choices, with tally marks denoting how many children could be in each area: blocks IIII; dress-up IIII; computer I; sand III; art materials ∞; garden IIII. She also wrote out a waiting list with the names of children who wanted to go to the library.

Children chatted quietly as Ali asked individual children to decide where they wanted to work. "I need you to move over, Lakiya. You can't keep talking to Raina." Lakiya moved over and laid her head down on the rug, curling her body into a ball. Ali asked children to make a different choice if an area was already full, and children managed this request quite well. Ali offered to make waiting lists for areas that were already full, and children were very receptive. As this process came to a close, one child piped up in a worried voice, "You forgot Lenora," though Ali had already called on Lenora.

Then, very clearly and directly, Ali called children to leave the rug by saying a child's name and the area/material that she or he had chosen. Children headed straight to their areas.

Activity Time 9:05-10:00 a.m.

There was a spacious area designated for building with unit blocks. In the middle lay a large, complex structure, with many animal figures on top of the building. The three boys who chose the block area did very little building, preferring to engage in dramatic play with animal and people figures, sometimes using the building as a setting for these characters. Across the room, two children sat at a computer. One child acted as a teacher for the child working on the computer. Nearby, two children worked on handwriting with Charlene. Ali left the room with a group of four children to go to the school's garden in the front of the building to pick radishes. The radishes would feed the butterfly caterpillars that the class was caring for.

Next to the block area, two boys and one girl were cheerfully playing in the dress-up area. The area contained props and accessories like baby dolls, fabrics, plastic dishes,

and other kitchen paraphernalia. There was also a small set of hollow blocks, which were left unused. Carlos, a 4-year-old, wore a baby tied to his front with fabric, and his playmate wore a baby doll tied to her back with fabric.

At a table next to the dress-up area, three girls and one boy were drawing with markers and cutting paper with scissors. This bunch was having an animated discussion about the spellings of their names and letters of the alphabet. One girl pointed out each letter in her name to the group. When one child was using a marker that another wanted, she said "Can I use that after you?" I was sitting nearby, and a boy asked me how to spell the name "Darius." Confidently, Raina suggested that this child look at a chart hanging up in the room to find out this information. These children seemed very engaged in their work, as did their classmates, who were beginning to cook a meal in the dress-up area.

Back in the block area, four boys were using a toy farm and a block structure as a setting for dramatic play. The structure consisted of arched shapes lined up against one another, with the open ends closed up by small, butter-stick size blocks. "It's time to wake up," one boy said, picking up the animals and holding them to make them walk. As they were playing, another boy knocked over part of the pre-existing large structure, even though he had been moving around it so carefully. With great focus, he immediately set to rebuilding the part that came undone.

At the sensory table, two boys were playing with plastic frogs, lizards, spiders, and other creatures hidden within the sand. Using plastic containers, they added water to the sand. They dunked spiders in a container of water, saying, "They're taking a bath."

The atmosphere of the classroom was free-flowing, and children moved between areas with ease. When Ali and the children returned from picking radishes, Lakiya

suggested making paintings of the radishes because they were so beautiful, an idea which was eagerly followed by others in the group. With the radishes on the table in full view, they used water color paints to recreate their beauty. Lakiya painted the progression of the radishes growing in the ground. As the group finished their paintings, they rushed to Ali to share them with her, jubilantly commanding, "Look!"

Sandy approached Ali with a request to move into another area that was already full. Upset, Sandy started throwing classroom objects. Using a serious but gentle voice, Ali asked her to find another way to solve that problem, asking her to take a break. Sandy quickly returned to the drawing table, seeming appeased. Prior to this incident, Charlene had complimented her by saying, "Sandy, you're being such a big girl this morning." Both teachers seemed encouraging and understanding in their interactions with her.

Throughout this "activity time," children were busy in the classroom, but there was a relaxed feeling—a feeling that children were trusted to make choices, work independently, and work together. As Ali talked with children, she used terms of endearment like "honeybee," "love," and "honey." In what seemed like too short a time, but had already been almost an hour, Ali announced "Two more minutes 'til cleanup." I left to use the bathroom, and cleanup happened quickly in my absence. When I returned five minutes later, children were already finished cleaning and gathering on the meeting rug.

Story Time 10:05-10:20 a.m.

There was a delay in starting the story, and the children were waiting on the rug, wiggling a bit. "Thanks for being patient. We had a shoe problem [one of the kids had a problem with her shoe]." First, Ali showed the class the radishes from the garden. While

this is going on, Lenora set up snack with the aid of Charlene and the paraprofessional. Each child had a cup from home set out on the tables.

During the reading of a humorous story entitled *Wiggle and Waggle*, about worms that aid in the composting process, one child called out while another was talking, and Ali reminded him to wait until Raina was finished. When children seemed distracted or antsy, she calmly rearranged their seats. As she read, the children appeared to be absorbed in the story, even Lakiya, who earlier in the day could not settle down on the rug. Ali resolved interruptions in stride, without missing a beat. At the end of the story, children asked questions that were on-topic, such as, "Why did the worms want to get out of the rain?"

After the story, Ali held a hardboiled egg up for observation. She requested that children listen closely as she cracked it, and then watch as she demonstrated peeling it. Children would do this themselves at snack.

Saying to a child who must have suffered a disappointment earlier, "I know you were very disappointed earlier. Why don't you call kids to wash their hands?" With a smile on her face, the little girl sat in Ali's seat and called children to go wash their hands for snack.

Snack 10:20-10:35 a.m.

Children washed their hands in the classroom sinks and then took their seats where they found their cups. Children ate "goldfish" crackers, and some ate hardboiled eggs. At one table, two boys discussed their preferences. "I like hardboiled eggs. How do you know you don't like the yolk if you don't try it?" one questioned.

At snack, some children changed their minds, and wanted to taste hardboiled eggs, but there were no extras. Charlene comforted, "We'll make more eggs at lunch. Some kids changed their minds and that's okay."

Transition to Outdoor Play Time in Big Yard 10:35 a.m.

Ali had to leave the classroom unexpectedly, and Charlene worked through this transition alone. Children began to clean up and get their jackets from their hooks in the hallway. Charlene starting counting, "One, two, three," and children made their way to the rug. "I'll wait," she informed them, as several children started talking instead of listening. She told them the "plan," letting them know that they would be going into the "big yard." She playfully encouraged them to walk down like "mariposas" [butterflies], reminding the children that butterflies don't talk. Then, she asked them to "fly" to the blue line to line up at the classroom door. Most children took on the role of a butterfly, and pretended to flutter over to the door. This process was accompanied by some jostling and noise.

As the "butterflies" began their descent, one child, Jason, momentarily halted the process. Upset about not being able to take a small, rubber ball to recess with him, he refused to walk with the group. Charlene, directing the line alone, told him that he might need to go to the office to talk about it. He threw his hat, and stayed behind. Leaving the front of the line to talk with him, Charlene coaxed him into joining the line.

After going down a flight of stairs, and exiting through a side door, the group entered the "big yard." There was a large blacktop area with basketball hoops, and a fence sectioned off another area where there was a large climber, with dark, soft tiles padding the earth beneath it. Many children broke off into groups to talk with one

another, run, climb, and play, joining the other classes who were outside, as well. Once in the yard, Charlene was able to talk with Jason again, and he calmed down considerably. A few minutes later, another child's ball went through one of the holes in the chain-link fence, and was immediately lost to the street. Jason called Charlene over to show her this, with a look of genuine understanding coloring his face. My observation ended here, and I returned inside the building to interview Ali.

Interview 2

Interview with Ali, a Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten Teacher at a Public School

May 7, 2008

Before we started the formal interview, Ali answered some of my informational questions about the age-range and size of her class. As I asked Ali to tell me more about the age-groupings in her class, she began to talk about classroom management.

Ali: The kids come in as pre-ks [pre-kindergärtners] and then stay for the second year, so that half a group is always coming in and half a group is always leaving, which I actually think is a really good thing for management. In some ways, it's less wieldy because it's a broader age range, but they wind up practicing... they can reflect on what it was like to start. I have the pre-ks from this year write to the incoming pre-ks, and when I talk to them about what it was like to start: "It was so scary. I didn't know where to go. I didn't know what to do." Who helped you? "The big kids helped me." And so, defining their role as partly that they're going to be in a helping relationship. Throughout the year, we're always talking about what helps you do your best work, what helps you when you don't know how to do something, what helps you if you're scared. So that it's; a lot of it is trying to de-center my role. Sorry, I have very strong feelings about mixed-age groupings. That being the bigger kid and the smaller kid in a class really helps with a lot of those issues that come up to work things out, because it doesn't necessarily put them in a position of empathy but it has greater potential for having kids be empathetic towards each other. It could also have the potential to have the big kids call the little kids stupid

and tell them they don't know how to do anything, which does occasionally happen, but not for long.

Jessica Anzelone: *What do you think of as classroom management? How do you think about classroom management?*

Ali: Well, I think, I think there are two pieces of it. When I was in school at City, it was a long time ago. It was like twenty years ago, where it was like, okay, if you have engaging curriculum, you're not gonna have behavior problems. And while I actually do think that that's fundamentally true, I don't think it's everything. Some kids come in and they have really good social skills, and some kids just don't. Like Lenora, the very blond kid who wanted to sit with Mina, I don't know if you noticed her. She has a tremendous imagination, so when she gets to go to dress-up, she's willing to be really flexible in a way that she can't be in other times, because she wants to keep the game going, because she loves it so much. So for her, it's almost like, if she could spend all day in dress-up, she'd have fewer behavior issues. Sandy, the other little kid who she's really drawn to—they're both drawn to each other—it's like two little kittens arguing with each other, but Sandy became a big sister in December, and she had the most classic sibling angst I have ever seen in my entire life. It was like all her stories were about: the baby wouldn't stop crying, and her mother and father were sick and dying, and all these sorts. I kept thinking, what am I going to do for this kid? I got a little baby figure; we have those little figures that go with the farm for the kids. They're like little puppets; they're bendable. But I got a baby, and said, okay, I hope this works. At art materials, we said, okay, we're gonna make some beds for the baby, and that became the activity she went to every single day. It's not like it solved everything, but before that she kept going around going, "I hate you.

You're not coming to my party," and driving everybody crazy, and then kids wanted to join her at this activity. She was calmer when she was there.

I think there is the thing of what's the work that's engaging for kids, but that's not all of it. And it really is knowing the kids really well. Like some kids need you to be a little bit flexible about the boundaries, and that's always tricky because you also want to be really clear so everybody knows what's expected. A kid like Darius, who does things calming—the shorthand of it is he's got some extreme OT [occupational therapy] issues—so he chews gum because it's very calming for him. If you have things in bad places, or you have too few of a material, it's also gonna start a fight. The marble mazes, which he loves to go to are very close to the meeting area because I haven't figured where else to put it, and he just leaned over during a meeting one day, and started playing with marble mazes, and Francesca [paraprofessional] said to him, "You can't do that. We're in the middle of meeting." He said, "Well I can chew gum, and nobody else can. Why can't I go to marble mazes?" I think you always have to be careful about *how* flexible you are because it sends very complicated messages to kids, but if I call him on every single thing he was doing, he would be in the doghouse the entire time. So, it's knowing kids well, and knowing what their interests are, and then also knowing where to make the strict boundary and where to try to find a way to give them a little breathing space.

And then, with Lenora, somehow I feel like because she's so inflexible—in her family they just wait for her to be flexible, which could take 45 minutes—so for her, when she gets to school, she can't believe that a boundary is like: no it's now. So, with her I feel like I have to be a hundred percent: No if I said it, it means now. It doesn't mean in 45 minutes when everyone's dog-tired. I think it's a combination of really engaging the kids

in work that's meaningful for them, but then also being thoughtful about where and when to make clear boundaries.

JA: *You said that you've been teaching for eighteen years. Do you feel that your thoughts about classroom management have evolved, and if so, then how?*

Ali: I think I've gotten better at it. I remember in the beginning, because we have a rest period after lunch, and the kids just need it. They don't wanna do it. I don't particularly wanna have them do it, but I feel like they're just dog-tired by the end of the day. I remember Mary, who's the principal, when I started teaching when I'd never been teaching, she had been teaching for seven years. I was saying I'm having so much trouble at rest. It's like trying to contain popcorn, and she said, you know, at the end of rest, give kids who are quiet a sticker. She's said that they have no reason for resting. They're really excited, and it's kind of like a little carrot that will give them some endurance. She said, "Don't do it all year; just do it for the first month. And when they have the habit of lying down, then it won't be so bad." And, I didn't love doing it because the kids who didn't get it, I felt like: They're failing rest? At the same time, it was a temporary solution that I didn't have to do forever, and then after about four or five years, I just felt like I said things clearly enough that kids kind of got it, and I didn't need to [give out stickers]… it's not like we have a perfectly quiet rest.

So in terms of evolution, I feel like it gets easier and sometimes you do wind up—like I would never do gold stars—but you know, that thing of how do you get kids to be able to do what they need to do when they're really little and you don't want to have it be rewards-based. Things like going on line—I got better at teaching kids how to walk on line with goofy things, like, "Oh my gosh, do you think you can crawl like a baby, and

not bump into the person in front of you?" And so those things feel a lot more automatic, and I can kind of make a better judgment call about what kids need at any particular time. My beliefs haven't changed hugely.

JA: *Were you in any other profession before teaching?*

Ali: I washed a lot of dishes, and I was in art school. I never saw myself as a gallery painter, but, I really hadn't intended to become a teacher. I didn't become a teacher—I didn't go to school for being a teacher—until I was thirty. You seem young and wonderful so don't take this the wrong way, but I actually think it's better to do something before. The student teachers that I've worked with… when you haven't done a lot of other things, it's kind of like trying to get the kids to do things becomes something that you believe can happen very easily. And I think when you're older and have more distance, you know you have less control. I see younger teachers thinking, okay, I'm going to make a perfect lesson plan and the kids are gonna do it, and then if the kids don't do it, it's more like, it's the fault of the kids. And it's not the fault of the lesson plan or the kids; it's just that life is messier than that. And I just think that, it's a generalization, but generally I think it's true that if you've done a couple of other things, you have a little more distance about teaching. But I've also had some really wonderful student teachers who were very young and great.

JA: *I noticed that during meeting if someone was off the rug, you would say, "I'll call on you when you find a spot."*

Ali: That works most of the time, not all of the time. But one thing I would say is that the first three months are really devoted to routines, and making them really fun, but also learning how we work with each other, and my doing a lot of floating—all of us, all of

the teachers doing a lot of floating, and saying, "I like how you're doing such and such," and, "Look, you put your ideas together," and I feel like that allows the subsequent activity times to be very independent so then I can actually spend uninterrupted time in the garden. Not that they're not 4 and 5, and not that they don't have arguments with each other, but that they become much more independent in problem-solving, and then we can get to other stuff besides that kind of intensive work around where do we find things, how do we share materials, how do we share ideas. In dress-up, if you wanna be Batman and somebody wants to have a restaurant, what do you do? If you have an idea for a really high tower in blocks and somebody else wants to [do something else], how do you solve those things? In the beginning, I'll listen to problems that kids are having and then I'll act them out with animals. I never name it as "so-and-so's problem," but I ask them how they would solve that problem, and then it's always hysterically funny because the kid who was the most entrenched is always the one who's like, "They just have to try to do such and such."

The other thing is that our non-competitive physical education teacher is trained in conflict resolution and does a lot of work school wide. I wouldn't say it's the perfect world; there are often times where you're impatient and you don't necessarily take the time to really deconstruct stuff. The one thing that I will say, that parents have said about the school, is that there is a much lower level of teasing. One of the things that gets our school in trouble is that people will choose our school because they've heard that kids don't get picked on, but they don't necessarily want classrooms that look like our classrooms academically. They say, "Can't you just do that with textbooks," and we say, "No, we really can't."

We talk a lot about the strategies that help you do your work well. Jennifer is a kindergarten kid. She has long dark hair and she's tiny, and she's a hoot. She's just such a funny kid. Last year, she drew a two, and the older kids in the class were like, "That's not a two," and I said, "That's the best two Ashley has ever made. She's really working so hard on her twos, and each time she tries it's gonna become more like the two that you're gonna recognize, and you need to think about what's gonna help her to keep trying making those twos so she gets better, and what would make it harder." That's a short version, but everyone's reaction after—it almost became like a bad Disney movie, like every time somebody tried to write something, somebody would say, "That's the best 'A' you've ever made!" Do you know Debbie Minor? She used to be the principal of a school, and then she started a high school—a really long time ago. It was in the 70s when East Harlem, the graduate rate was really low, and basically the person who was the superintendent said do whatever you can, and we give you free reign. And she has always talked about how kids do not naturally love each other. You know that thing about how it's some wonderful state [childhood], the state of sort of grace and innocence. Kids can be really horrible to each other, and those are all learned skills. Often in our school we complain that we don't get enough time, or we can't find enough time around all the curriculum, and the academic needs and all the pressures around testing have really jettisoned the work that we do. It has become narrower. I think there's still the inclination and an attempt and a desire to create a different climate and to try and build for each age what it means to be a kind and a caring person, and part of a community and have a very strong sense of community, which I think is really great. I think that that comes out of valuing work and valuing kids, and teaching kids to value each other's work.

Observation 3

Kindergarten Class in an Independent School

May 21, 2008

Introduction to the School

Located in Greenwich Village in Manhattan, this independent school serves children from pre-K through high school. The building that I visited included the Lower and Middle School, with grades pre-K through eighth. The Lower School maintains 13 classes and 250 students between the ages of 4 and 10. Varying according to the age of the children and enrollment, each class has 16 to 23 students. The school states that it strives to maintain ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. Tuition ranges from about $28,000 to about $31,000 per year, depending on the grade level of the students. Financial aid is available, but it is not clear how many families receive this aid. Founded in the spirit of progressive education, the school continues to focus on experiential and active learning, fostering the growth and development of children as they make sense of the world around them. There is also a strong curricular emphasis on aspects of social justice and community.

There were 18 children in the kindergarten class in which I observed. Three of the children were 5-years-old, and the rest of the class had already turned 6, with many birthdays in November, December, and January. More than half the class, in addition to both teachers, appeared to be white, and there were students who appeared to be African American, Asian, and Latino. There was a head teacher, Sara, and an Associate Teacher, Megan. The school day begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 2:45 p.m. for kindergarteners. The

kindergarteners work with specialist teachers during Music, Movement, and Spanish classes. Science, math, and handwriting are also scheduled to take place during the afternoon work periods.

Classroom Arrangement and Materials

I walked through the door located in the left hand corner of the large, rectangular classroom. To the immediate left was a wall of cubbies where children kept their jackets, bags, and other personal items from home. Storage cabinets rested above the cubbies. To the right were three rectangular tables and two circular ones, with 20 chairs spread out among them, and ample space for walking between tables. In addition, a sensory table was pushed to the wall to the right of me. Straight ahead, after the row of storage, there were shelves with individual cubbies for holding children's work, and a table with a computer and a chair, which seemed intended for the teachers' use. Behind that, a quarter of the room—quite a large space—was designated as a unit block area. Shelves of blocks spanned half of the left and back wall, meeting in a perpendicular shape, from which an empty space spanned.

In the far right corner, a much smaller space appeared to be devoted to accessories for dramatic play. Bordering this, an indoor plant light hung above a table full of green plants, giving the room a feeling of warmth. That table also touched the meeting area, a sizeable rectangular rug. On the left side of the rug lay another shelf of unit blocks, dividing the two spaces. On top of the shelf, there was a tank for the class pets—snails, as well as a variety of seeds displayed in small, clear plastic containers. There was also a display bookshelf facing into the meeting area. Shelves bordering both the dramatic play

and meeting area held manipulatives such as table blocks, mobile (construction materials), bristle blocks, legos, and interlocking cubes.

At the near left corner of the rug, there was a display bookshelf that faced the block area, and shelves which held writing folders, letter charts, writing paper, tape, staplers, and scissors facing in toward the tables. The meeting rug met the wall on its right, and classroom information was hung there such as the calendar, worktime choices, and a chart of caterpillar growth. There were windows there, as well, which appeared to admit very little light. On shelves below, there was an array of puzzles. On additional shelves against the wall, closer to the tables and past the rug, bins of playdough, tiles, pattern blocks, and cubes found their home. In the near right hand corner of the room, there were more cubbies and an entrance into a bathroom which had two bathroom stalls and two sinks.

On the walls, children's colorful artwork was presented without names. Paintings were clustered close together on the far wall, along with drawings with accompanying text. Math fraction work was also exhibited on the walls. The room seemed neat, orderly, and spacious.

Arrival 8:30-8:40 a.m.

As Sara opened the classroom door, she offered children a warm welcome, greeting them by saying, "You look ready to start the day." Children entered with their parents, and immediately rushed to answer the question on a chart propped up in the meeting area. The graph asked: "Do you have a brother/sister/both/none?" with the categories "brother," "sister," "both," and "none" above separate columns. One child spontaneously began meeting arrivals at the door to tell them about "Sophie S.'s [an

author's] question of the day." There were very few items set out for arrival—books about seeds on one circular table, interlocking connectors at another, and pencils and crayons at a rectangular table. Children hung up their jackets, marked their answers for the question of the day, and worked for a few minutes before Sara used a rainmaker to produce a sound that indicated that it was time to clean up.

Cleanup and Attendance 8:40-8:50 a.m.

As soon as the rainmaker sounded, Sara and Megan began to put away the materials that were out. Children said their goodbyes to their parents, most exchanging hugs and kisses. Then the group headed over to the large, rectangular rug where the children marked their attendance—putting papers with their names on a board under a photograph of the classroom. When this was finished, Sara stated, "Let's move to our steady spots." Sara commented encouragingly, "Look how steady [child's name] moved back to her spot." Megan sat on the rug with the children, giving them quiet reminders to settle down from time to time.

When children found their places along the edge of the rug, they began to count how many students were present. They went around the circle, with each individual child counting off, reaching the number twelve. A few children arrived late, and quickly moved their names over on the attendance board, joining the others on the rug. Sara asked the group to try to figure out how many children were *not* there. One child responded, "Since 14 are here, I counted four to 18." As students explained how they arrived at the number, Sara made affirming remarks such as, "That was really clear." At the close of the discussion, Sara requested that one child "Start our steady line."

Transition to Outdoor Play Time on Roof 8:50-8:55 a.m.

The group gathered quietly in a line, and left the room to ascend two flights of stairs to reach the roof. Megan led the line, giving the children verbal reminders such as, "If you hear me look this way," "Turn voices off," and "Get steady." With quiet enthusiasm, she said, "It's a beautiful day outside. I can't wait to start work."

Roof 8:55-9:45 a.m.

By the start of deck, all eighteen children had arrived. When the group emerged onto the roof and into the warm spring air, Megan made an announcement about what was "open" on the roof. She also talked about "kindergartners sharing" the materials on the roof. The items in the "shed," a large covered storage space, were available for use, including hollow blocks, large metal climbing triangles, and wooden boards. Three girls immediately set up a seesaw using a board on a metal sawhorse. They were next to a wooden climber which had a climbing wall, a slide, platforms and ladders at different levels. The roof offered views of the city, and, even with its high fences, possessed an open feeling.

In an empty space, a small group of children set up their own place to climb. Together, they pushed metal triangles and carried metal ladders to the spot. They hooked the metal row of bars to the triangles on either end, creating impromptu monkey bars. One little girl, Sam, showed me the "tricks" that she could maneuver on these bars. Hanging from her knees, she worried, "I'm in the lava pit." Meanwhile, Sara coaxed a little boy, who was crying pitifully, out from under the climber. Sara drew him out of his sadness, asking him, "Do you know any tricks," and steering him to the makeshift monkey bars. He stopped crying rather quickly and became interested in climbing.

Children raced around the deck on scooters, and a child accidentally hit Megan's feet with one. "Please be careful where you're steering," she reminded. The teachers sat on benches off to the side, taking copious notes on clipboards, and the atmosphere remained lively but orderly.

Social Negotiations

"Now it's my turn," insisted a child who wanted his turn on a scooter, and he took a spin on the vehicle. Four boys decided to make an obstacle course for the scooters out of hollow blocks, and seven children gathered on the track. Two boys rolled over the triangle blocks that they had laid out end to end, and ended up on top of Chris's body. Sara briskly walked over, and gently asked the boys to get off of Chris. Then she asked Chris how he felt, and made sure that he was okay. The children had been working on taking turns on the scooters, which proved to be challenging since most of them wanted to be the drivers. Sara asked, "Jay, could you explain to Tom how you could share this [scooter] with him?" After a brief explanation, she questioned Tom, "Does that sound fair?" Later, as children continued these negotiations, one child said to another, "She's going to give it [the scooter] to me in six more minutes."

Four steps up from this moderately-sized area was an equal space with another climber, a metal one that was larger and higher than the one below. There were tube spaces to crawl through and sit within, and it offered children opportunities to climb to high spots. There was also trampoline mesh material on the second level of the climber, near the fire pole. Two girls sat on this structure. In a serious tone, one said to the other, "I have a question to ask you. Are you hot? I know just the place to cool off," and she pointed to another part of the climber.

Children seemed to use the hollow blocks and building accessories for creating structures that required them to master physical feats. Four girls worked together to build an addition to the makeshift monkey bars, using small wooden triangles, wooden crates, and boards. Their work was not extremely perilous, but some might have seen their balancing and climbing as worthy of a word of caution. The teachers watched carefully, but said nothing. There was a sense of trust in children's abilities.

Children moved around the roof freely, and seemed to feel a sense of ownership and competence in their use of materials. Playing and working independently, they rarely approached the teachers to ask for help or assistance. In addition, the limits for children seemed clear. For instance, children were asking about taking off their outer layers of clothing. The temperature was in the high 60s, and teachers told them that if children had more than one layer of clothing under their coats, they could take their coats off, and if not, they had to leave them on. Children respected this limit.

There was very little shouting, and the children's conversations unfolded in hushed tones. It was striking how few arguments and fights emerged, and how seldom Sara and Megan had to intervene in the children's negotiations. Primarily, the teachers were quiet, active observers.

With five minutes left until cleanup, Sara and Megan walked around the deck, quietly informing children, "Kindergartners, we're going to pick up in five minutes."

Cleanup on Roof 9:40-9:45 a.m.

The time passed quickly, and the teachers roamed the deck again, telling children, "It's time to start picking up." Children stopped playing and began to put items away. With children riding on top, large rubber balls with handles were bounced back to their

places. The kindergartners and their teachers worked together to clean. One girl wore a crate on her head, acting as a "space alien," and saying, "Ch, ch, ch," as Sara guided her with a light touch on the shoulder. The cleanup process was tame, with children returning the materials to their original spots without protest. A few children made siren, "whoo" noises as they rode the scooters back, but still, it was a quiet and orderly process.

When the cleanup was complete, children lined up against a building wall. Megan called their attention, "Kindergartners, eyes on me," and then, "Sides against the wall. Stay just as steady on the walk downstairs." The travel was brief and uneventful.

Transition to Snack 9:45-9:50 a.m.

Upon arrival in the classroom, four children who had the job of "snack helper" worked to set out snack. The rest of the class sat on the meeting rug, waiting to be called to go to snack. Sara instructed, "Think of the letters in your first name. If the second letter in your name is an 'a,' please get ready for snack." On the tables laid bowls of oranges and crackers, and pitchers of water.

Snack 9:50-10:10 a.m.

When everyone was ready for snack, they sat at their tables waiting. Sara stood where everyone could see her and said, "Eyes on me. Hands on sides. Snack is a great time for friends to talk, but talk with friends at your table." With that signal, children began to eat and chat.

At one table, children were showing each other ways to make animals and shapes with their hands. The little boy who had been crying on deck earlier now chatted easily with his neighbors, earnestly informing them that there is a bomb that could "explode a whole half of the earth." Later, Sara whispered to him, "Snack time is a steady time."

"Snack is ending, friends. Please come to the rug," Sara announced. Most children began to clean up, but a table of five lingered, waiting a minute or two before throwing away their trash. Children chatted as they sat down on the rug. Some remained standing. "We're waiting for everyone standing to please sit down," Sara stated gently but firmly.

Full Group Meeting 10:10-10:35 a.m.

Sitting on the rug with her students, Sara looked around at the group, drawing attention to one child's behavior, "Looks like Bella is ready for our meeting. She's sitting steady with her hands in her lap…meeting is a time for talking and listening." Waiting and watching for a few minutes, Sara began the meeting when every child was still and ready. Then she gave the child next to her a stone, which was passed from child to child around the circle. As the stone circulated, the kindergartners said hello to the person who gave them the stone, as well as the person to whom it was passed.

When the greetings were completed, children turned their attention to the daily schedule that was posted on a bulletin board bordering the meeting area. The schedule consisted of a vertical stack of words reading: roof; deck; meeting; worktime; lunch; rest; music; worktime; storytime; go home. As children wiggled, moved from their spots, or attempted to initiate a conversation with their neighbor, Sara gave them verbal reminders to get "steady," and waited to continue until she had their attention. As the group waited for those children to settle down, others seemed to lose some of their composure, but ultimately, the entire group was pulled back to attention.

Next, Sara asked children to skywrite the number 152 with their index fingers, seeming to indicate the number of schooldays so far. Then they discussed the date. One child read the date from the day before, and Sara questioned what today's date would be.

Appearing to follow a familiar routine, Sara then read the "morning message" on a board in the meeting area: "Hello kindergartners. Today is Wednesday. We have music in the afternoon. Did you know that we will talk about the musical?"

A discussion of the 4th grade musical about immigration ensued. Several children eagerly raised their hands to share their thoughts and questions about the show. The children asked questions about the wooden chest that was in the musical. Sara talked about the idea of props in a play. One child said, "It felt like my buddy was staring at me." Another commented, "My favorite part of the play was when Sharon was holding the flashlight." The students told others about what they noticed during the play. When a few children began to chat amongst themselves, Sara reminded, "Friends are holding up hands if they want to say something." Children were expected to speak only when called on, to sit fairly still, and to listen attentively when others were speaking.

Sara asked the class what they learned about immigration from the musical. One boy asked, "Why if they're [immigrants are] sick do they have to go straight back?" As the discussion continued, some children remained fully engaged, with their eyes trained on Sara, and their hands raised. A few appeared to be slightly distracted and lacking energy. "I didn't know that some families had their names changed." Another child stumbled, "Why did they only have people coming from Europe, and not from...from...the Caribbean?" Sara responded by saying that at the time of Ellis Island, people were arriving from Europe. Evan, who remembered his idea from earlier, forgot it again as he began to speak. Sara and the children rallied him, helping him to remember what he had been thinking about.

Megan was sitting on the side of the rug with a large piece of paper. She introduced the idea of making a card for the 4th graders. She asked, "Can someone think of a really big word that people can say when someone does a really good job?" She wrote the word "congratulations," and included children's ideas for the card such as, "Congratulations! I liked your play." Later, the kindergartners had an opportunity to sign the card.

Making Decisions for Worktime Activities 10:35-10:40 a.m.

The meeting was ending, and it was time for teachers and children to make decisions about worktime activities. Sara asked some children to go to specific areas, while other children decided for themselves. The choices were: bookmaking; drawing; table blocks; blocks; painting; math games; writing. Sara asked one child to work on an alphabet book and nine children to play a math game with the math teacher who had entered the room. Two girls chose bookmaking. Two girls and one boy chose drawing, and a girl and a boy chose to build with unit blocks.

Worktime 10:40-11:55 a.m.

Children quietly scattered to their places in the room, many working industriously from the start. The group of nine children playing the math game spread themselves out at tables and on the floor, chatting with one another as they colored in photocopied game boards and invented game rules. In the generous space of the block area, Jay began working on building a "toy store," with a serious expression on his face.

Several children were engrossed in drawing and creating objects out of paper. Megan sat at a table with those children, and at a table nearby, Sara joined the children who were working on books. The two girls were drawing with crayons on the blank

pages. A girl with dark, curly pigtails explained part of her story to her peer and teacher. "When the baby came out of Violet's tummy, the baby was wearing clothes."

Although many children were interacting with one another, they also appeared to be engaged in parallel, individual work. As worktime continued, the math game ended, and three more boys chose to build in the block area. Jay and one boy started to work together, and the other two paired off. The girl continued to build alone. Getting excited, Jay jumped over his block structure. Megan was quick to remind him, "When we move around the classroom, we always walk." A few minutes later, as Jay and his building partner were being moved to silliness, and jumping around the block area, Sara stated that there was "too much energy in the block area. This is a steady time. We can have fun while we do it." The boys stopped building and were continuing to get riled up, and after a few minutes, Sara settled herself into the block area near them. Some time passed, and Jay approached Sara to reassure her, "I think I can be steady in blocks." "What does that mean?" Sara prodded him, and he responded seriously, "Not being so silly."

As worktime progressed, children seemed to interact more with one another. Back at the drawing table, one girl asked the others, "Should I do a red kite?" and without waiting for a response, immediately began working on making a red kite. Two other girls discussed their drawings, and one asked the other how to spell "can," carefully writing down the response of "k-e-n." Finding the broken tip of a pencil, one child rolled a piece of paper, placing the pencil tip at the end, and made herself a new paper pencil. Nearby, a fresh group of children were coloring in the math game boards excitedly, and they chattered softly among themselves.

Meanwhile, worktime was coming to a close, and Megan began setting up for lunch. Sara prepared for cleanup by putting away unused items. Then she and two children left the room to deliver the congratulatory card to the 4th graders. When Sara returned, she moved around the room to inform children, "We're going to be cleaning up in five minutes."

Worktime Cleanup and Transition to Lunch 11:55 a.m.- 12:00 p.m.

After five minutes passed, the class began to clean up. Everyone helped in the cleanup, and as children finished replacing items on the shelves, they met Megan on the rug. Megan held their attention with sound and movement patterns that the children were prompted to follow. Cleanup happened quickly, though some children were reluctant to stop working. This sparked the occasional reminder, such as, "If you were at the drawing table, please finish cleaning up."

When everyone was seated quietly on the rug, Megan asked the "lunch helpers" to make triangle shapes with their hands so that she would know who had that job. Then she asked them to tiptoe over to wash their hands. As children were called to wash their hands for lunch, Megan asked them to find "different ways of moving," such as walking on their heels.

Lunch 12:00 p.m.

Children ate a family style lunch, with lunch provided by the school and shared among all the children. The kindergartners sat at the tables in assigned seats in groups of four or five. The students had input into deciding their seat assignments, which changed weekly, but ultimately teachers created the setup. The lunch helpers answered number sentences such as 2+3=? before picking up the plates of food for their tables. Lunch

consisted of hot options—beef, broccoli, and rice, as well as cold sandwich choices. Once the food was on the table, children passed the platters to one another and served themselves. As the children began to eat, they also began to converse, and one could hear the soft buzz of chatter rising up.

Interview 3

Interview with Sara, a Kindergarten Teacher in an Independent School

May 22, 2008

Jessica Anzelone: *How do you think about classroom management?*

Sara: How do I *think* about it?

JA: *What do you see as the basis for classroom management in your class?*

Sara: Well I think that children really desire and require some structure in order to feel comfortable and confident in the work they do, and knowing that they can depend on reliable ways of monitoring the flow of the day and monitoring their own behavior is important to them. So, I've worked pretty hard to create systems that are consistent for them and child-friendly, and hopefully feel comforting to them and not restrictive to them so that they can do their best work but know what the limits are, and know when transitions will occur and know when there will be closure, when there will be starting—all the different points of the day. I think it's something, particularly in kindergarten, in that it's this age that they're really moving toward greater independence, but I think to get a greater sense of independence, they have to have even more of a basis of consistency, so that they can know where the leaping point off is everyday.

JA: *What do you think of as classroom management?*

Sara: What do I think of as classroom management? I think of every aspect of the room as designed to give them [children] the kind of structure and support that they need. Everything—from where the tables are, to where the materials are, to what time of day we plan to have rest time—is a form of management. It's knowing what's appropriate in

the flow of the day, what's appropriate in the flow of the space, what's gonna give the child the greatest sense of comfort and confidence. So pretty much everything that I think of in terms of planning out the year from scratch when you walk into an empty room has to be thinking about: How am I, as the teacher, designing an environment in a day, in a week, in a year to give each child enough support to really do the kind of work that they want to do and have the kind of growth that they deserve. Managing their environment and the day and the materials and the content of what they're learning is all part of my job, and all part of what I hope to provide each child. Even the curriculum—you have to think of the curriculum as being appropriate, whether they enter the curriculum through appropriate materials, whether those materials are accessible to them, how do they know how to use them, how do they get practice with them. You would see in a course listing "classroom management" as separate from "curriculum," but I sort of see it as all-encompassing. I've never really thought of it that way—I've never said it out loud, but I've always felt that way—that all, *all* of what a teacher needs to do is really managing how a child is going to be growing and learning for the year.

JA: *What are some classroom management difficulties that you are faced with?*

Sara: Within every group of students, there are always going to be children who have their own particular needs, and I think the challenges arise when the patterns of needs are similar—if you have a number of children who have difficulty with transitional moments, or a number of children who have issues with separation. If you have a concentration of either similar challenges, or even a wider *array* of challenges, then it becomes really hard for a teacher. Like if you get to know your children and you watch where they have the most challenges and the most difficulties, and you have a number of kids who are all over

the spectrum. I think that can be challenging, and if there is a high concentration of a certain type of challenge, that can be hard also. Are you asking for myself, personally as teacher, what do *I* find challenging?

JA: *Yes.*

Sara: I think to me the hardest—I don't know if it's the hardest or what I find most frustrating—are children who have harder times during transitions, getting them to move from one type of activity to another without requiring a lot of support. This year it's not so bad, but in other years, I've had classes where there's a large number of children who have that issue. I'm very grateful to have another teacher in the room to really help out with that because I've been a teacher where I have been a solo teacher in a room, and you really have to manage your day differently when you know that kids have really hard times if they have a physical transition moving from one part of the room to the other or even a content transition when you're moving from a math time to a story time, or whatever it is. If there are a lot of kids who have that type of modality, where that's hard for them, I think that's the part, for me personally, that I get frustrated with. I think that just takes a lot of support and patience and giving kids better guidelines.

JA: *How many years have you been teaching?*

Sara: This is my eighth year in education. And not all of those years have been in teaching. I have done some administrative years.

JA: *Looking back, have your thoughts about classroom management evolved?*

Sara: They've definitely changed. Some of my first teaching experiences were in public school and the expectations of management—what the environment was like was different, what materials available were different, and also the tone was expected to be

different. So, I've had to modify. I feel like where I am now, and the school I'm in now, is much more in tune with what I want to do personally as an educator, so I've modified. I think what a teacher often needs to do is modify management expectations based on the kind of culture that's in the school. I've been told that in this particular school, my classroom looks and feels more like a laboratory, or like a workshop. There's always stuff going on, that there are quiet moments, too, but it's very busy; there's a lot of stuff, not always, but on most days, a lot of the day feels that way, and if I had a classroom like that where I used to teach, that wouldn't be acceptable. Children were expected to be at tables or at desks. So being mindful of course of what's right for kids, but then also knowing what's right for your school culture is something to be mindful of as you're trying to think about the management of your classroom.

JA: *Were you in any other field besides administration and education?*

Sara: I've done a lot of other things.

JA: *Before you came to teaching?*

Sara: Before I came to teaching, I had about eight years of work experience that had nothing to do with children. I worked for an entertainment company and then a retail company, nothing that was related to children.

JA: *I noticed that some of the more verbal classroom management seemed to be about you and Megan [assistant teacher] saying things such as: "Think about what you're doing," and "Think about where your body is."*

Sara: That's definitely something that I think about, helping children make their own realizations. We talk a lot—part of the school culture, and then also the classroom culture, is talking about making steady choices, and what does that mean. One big

conversation that we had as a class, about halfway through the year, and I've heard this in other classrooms before, and even last year kids in my class would say, "Oh, I'm not steady next to this person." "I can't sit here because I'm not steady next to this friend." And other times, I would say, "Okay, then make a different choice." About halfway through the year this year, it just sort of occurred to me, and we had a meeting, and I said, "The steadiness comes from inside of you." We, the kids, had a whole conversation of what it feels like when you feel steady inside and how you get that way. So this complaint of I can't feel steady next to somebody was invalid. They couldn't say that anymore. Of course, they still do—they still say that, and I understand what they mean. I understand that someone feels exciting or stimulating, or that they can't help but wanna chat or nudge them, or whatever it is. I get it. I understand why they're feeling that way, but reminding them that they can sit next to somebody and they can *try* to find a way to find it within themselves was a realization for me as a teacher to try to help the children express that for themselves. And, some of the kids really held onto that, and I think that was a really helpful thing for them. I'm glad you noticed that we try to really help the kids articulate for themselves how they can help themselves, and I think that's an important part of kindergarten. At the beginning of the year I wouldn't have been as assertive with those kinds of probing questions: "Well, if you're not making a good choice, how can you make a better choice right now?" "If that happened, can you think about what happened before you felt that way?" You know things like that I wouldn't have necessarily said to a child so directly, but at this point of the year, I think that they can really start to hear that because they've been with the same group all year. They know what the expectations are in the room, and they can start to make changes for themselves, but I feel like they're not

going to if it all is external. They need to start to verbalize it for themselves, I feel like the kids that are able to do that are making bigger strides—the ones that can take a moment, and say, "Oh, I shouldn't have done that because...," or "I decided to do that because it just felt funny," or whatever, and then saying, "Okay, well, next time you feel funny, what can you do instead?" It sort of opens up the dialogue so that they can trust a teacher to be helpful to them and not be somebody who's going to be getting them in trouble. Some of the kids at the beginning of the year—there was definitely a feeling like oh I got in trouble, and we talked about that, too. That was another big conversation we had as a class. Teachers are here to help, and if you're having a bumpy day—we talk about "bumpy days"—if you're feeling unsteady, if you're having a bumpy day, or things don't feel like they're going right, a teacher can help you. You're not going to get in trouble for feeling funny like that. We try to dispel that idea of "getting in trouble," and I think by helping them articulate for themselves how they can help themselves, it takes the onus off the teacher to say, "Well, you need to have time out." They might say, "I need a break." "Well, okay, then take one. That's a good idea." And then it comes from them. I think it's harder. I think it's asking a lot of kids, but I think it's respectful of kids, to let them get to that themselves. It's definitely harder for them, and they look at you the first time you ask them like, "What?" but I think they're used to it by now. They're used to those kinds of conversations with us.

Comparison and Analysis

In this section, I will be comparing and analyzing the information from the observations and interviews that I conducted. I will be covering each of the eight categories that I discussed in the earlier section, "Observing Classroom Management: What I was Examining and Why." These categories are: environment; class schedule; transitions; group living; classroom tone; opportunities for discussion; opportunities for children to choose activities and work; opportunities for shared work. These categories are not mutually exclusive—they overlap a great deal—and I may refer to an example more than once in order to reveal their connections. It is also important to bear in mind that these observations were conducted in the spring, revealing the fruition of teachers' aims in the classroom. Below, I have included a table (Table 1) with basic information about the observations, comprised of the observation number, the location of the school, the type of school, the names of the head and the assistant/associate teachers, and the grade level and age of the students, in order to remind the reader of the distinctions between the three observations.

Table 1

Information about Classroom Observations

Observation	School Location	Independent or Public	Head Teacher's Name	Assistant or Associate Teacher's Name	Grade Level	Age
1	Morningside Heights Uptown Manhattan	Independent School	Jane[1]	Teresa	4/5s	4 and 5-year-olds
2	East Village Downtown Manhattan	Public School	Ali	Charlene	Pre-k/ kindergarten	4, 5, and 6-year-olds
3	Greenwich Village Downtown Manhattan	Independent School	Sara	Megan	Kindergarten	5 and 6-year-olds

Environment: Classroom Arrangement and Materials

The physical spaces of the three rooms—the 4/5s classroom, the pre-k/k classroom, and the kindergarten classroom—were both similar and unique. The sizes and shapes varied, but as one would imagine in early childhood progressive settings, spaces designated for building with unit blocks and intended for group meetings were present in all three. It was clear that serious thought had been given to the placement of materials—easily accessible to the children—and the division of areas in the rooms. The rooms had considerable space for work that did not require sitting in a chair, such as blockbuilding

[1] As stated earlier, teachers' names have been changed.

and dramatic play, which tends to the physical developmental needs of children between the ages of 4 and 6. Tables intended for multipurpose uses such as seated work like drawing and using manipulatives and eating meals were minimized to take up less than half the space in all three locations. Low shelves, which held materials relevant to the particular space in the room, such as the drawing area or the unit block area, helped divide the spaces into what ultimately constituted clear and understandable classroom layouts. In addition, there was space in each of the rooms for children to move from one point to another without bumping one another. Jane, the 4/5s teacher, talked about making the space physically comfortable for the children in her class. Sara, the kindergarten teacher, also considered the role of furniture arrangement in relation to classroom management. Overall, the three classrooms appeared to be easily navigated by their young inhabitants.

Areas of the Room

All three classrooms had open areas for meeting, building with unit blocks, engaging in dramatic play, and tables that could be used for art, using manipulatives, cooking, eating, and a multitude of other activities. The size of these areas varied from room to room. For instance, Jane's 4/5s class had a tinier unit block area than the other two classes, perhaps due to being confined by a slightly smaller classroom space. Four children were building individually during worktime, working within a specific area designated by masking tape on the floor. The area was busy, but crowded. However, the 4/5s dramatic play area, which doubled as the area for group meetings, was larger and more prominent than that of the other two classes. The size of the area lent itself to the elaborate play in which the children engaged. They collaborated with one another to

choose a theme, and played this theme out as a group. This is an example of how the allocation of space has an impact on what children do in that space—the greater the size of an area, the more possibility there is for social interaction. The dramatic play area in the kindergarten class seemed to occupy a small space, though it is possible that the children take the available accessories and props to other parts of the room such as the meeting rug. While I was observing, this area was left unused. In that room, the meeting rug was also used for manipulatives such as mobilo, bristle blocks, legos, and interlocking cubes, while in Jane's 4/5s room, there was a separate rug for children to use those materials. The areas themselves, and the use of tables in lieu of individual desk seating, appear to invite children to work together. They are made for groups, or perhaps for individuals to work side-by-side. The meeting areas, which all had soft carpets, had enough space for children to sit comfortably, although this area was slightly smaller in Ali's pre-k/k class, tempting children to wiggle a little too close to their neighbors.

Materials

In each of the rooms, the majority of the materials available, including unit blocks and construction materials, seemed to suggest that children could work together if desired and allowed. The limited availability of certain items, such as hollow blocks in Jane's 4/5s dramatic play space, pushed children to work together in order to create the props necessary to enact their ideas. On the other hand, Ali, the pre-k/k teacher, noted the importance of having enough of a material available in order to divert potential conflicts between children. The dramatic play area in Jane's 4/5s classroom included accessories such as bottle caps and corks, which could be used to symbolize a range of objects. During my observation, a little boy filled a bowl with them and pretended it was dog

food. Ali's pre-k/k class, while having many of the same open-ended materials, also had a strong selection of more representational materials; for instance there was a small farm set with accompanying animals and people in the block area. Drawing and writing materials were abundant in each room, and while children tended to work on individual art pieces, they sat in small groups, bantering and sharing ideas with one another. Many of the materials in all three of the classes would be considered open-ended. Although all three of the classrooms seemed to focus on offering open-ended materials such as blocks and art supplies, materials such as puzzles and games, which have specific and predictable outcomes, were also present. The use of classroom materials will be discussed in more depth in the upcoming sections: "Opportunities for Children to Choose Activities and Work" and "Opportunities for Shared Work."

Visual Aids

A common thread in each of the classrooms was the use of visual aids that provided children with information about the daily schedule and the placement of materials. Each class had a schedule with different parts of the day represented in drawings, and the pre-k/k and kindergarten class had corresponding words, as well. The attendance board in the kindergarten class was another visual tool to mark the children's presence in the room. The job chart in the 4/5s seemed to be an integral part of classroom life, with children consulting it on their own throughout the morning. The drawn and written labels for cooking supplies were created by the children themselves in the pre-k/k class. Silhouettes for objects like hollow and unit blocks seemed to be extremely helpful to children in the 4/5s as they set to the work of cleaning up. Shelves and bins in all three rooms were labeled with both words and drawings, again providing children with the

scaffolding some might require in order to take care of the classroom materials themselves. Jane stated:

> You look at how the shelves are laid out to make cleanup easier and more autonomous. They [the children] do know where things go because there are labels that help them know that, so there's an external structure there and an expectation that's visual and it's very clear. And, again it sends them the message that things in this classroom have a place and they're responsible for putting them there, and they can because we've made it at their height and they're physically capable.

Potential Effect of Location on Transitions

The proximity of other school areas, such as the playground or play deck, also has an effect on classroom management. The 4/5s room had a distinct advantage of possessing a door that opened directly onto the play deck. Thinking about the pre-k/k class struggling through the transition of moving from their room, down the stairs, and out into the playground, one could see the innate benefit of having easy access to outdoor space. While the kindergarten class travelled two flights of stairs to reach their play deck without much noise or mishap, they were still being taxed with the task of having to stay "quiet" and "steady." An advantage for all three rooms was having at least one toilet and one sink in the classroom itself, so that children did not need to leave the room to go to the bathroom or wash their hands. Having sinks located in the classroom could also make a difference in everyday classroom life in terms of basic cleaning, as well as cooking.

Aesthetic

When I envision the three classrooms, it is the presence of the children's work that comes first to my mind. Each room had a distinct appearance, but children's work was displayed in all three, with paintings most prominent in the 4/5s and pre-k classrooms, imbuing the space with an aesthetic that seemed to heavily value children's artistic endeavors. It was children's art, and not teacher-made bulletin boards, that covered the classroom walls. Hanging children's paintings demonstrates to children "that they have an impact on, and some ownership of their classroom. This visual sharing of ideas through paint is a way of encouraging democracy in the classroom" (Decker, 2006, p. 27). This also can foster a sense of community within the classroom, which is interwoven with the positive functioning of a classroom. There was also the sense that children were trusted with quality, beautiful materials, such as the wooden bowls in Jane's 4/5s, the fabric used in the Ali's pre-k/k, and the delicate plants growing in Sara's kindergarten.

Nature

The teachers also managed to bring nature into the classroom in one form or another. In Jane's room, there were hanging plants in front of each window; the sensory table contained stones, seashells, and sand; snails and vegetation filled a glass tank. For Ali's pre-k/k, the enormous school garden in the front of the building seemed to act as an extension of the classroom space. During the observation, she took a group of children to pick radishes and bring them back to the room. Sara's kindergarten room had a glass tank with snails, as well as seeds on display. In addition, there was the table of greens growing beneath an indoor plant light. In this room, it softened the effect of low natural light.

Outdoor Equipment and Materials

The play deck adjacent to Jane's 4/5s classroom and the play roof that was available to Sara's kindergartners were more similar to one another than either was to the play yard at the downtown public school. Both independent schools had a wide selection of large, hollow blocks and wooden boards for building, in addition to free-standing, oversized wooden crates. They also had oversized metal triangles for climbing and setting up seesaws with wooden planks. The play roof at the downtown independent school offered metal sawhorses and metal ladders that could be hooked onto the sawhorses and triangles, which children used to create makeshift monkey bars during my observation. At this school, there were also scooters, as well as rubber balls large and sturdy enough for children to sit on and bounce. The materials available outdoors at both independent schools seemed to encourage children to create their own structures both for climbing and for supporting dramatic play endeavors. I noticed children engaging in those types of play in both settings. The kindergartners in Sara's class cooperated to lift and push heavy items such as the metal ladders and triangles. Together, they created their own climbing structure—it was a very social effort. The kindergartners' play roof offered the widest array of construction and play items, in addition to two types of fixed climbing structures, one which offered children the opportunity to climb quite high. The play deck that the 4/5s used also had a sizeable climber. While I did not have the opportunity to observe children at the downtown public school during their outdoor play, I walked out into the yard with them and took note of their equipment—a large climber sectioned off on one side, and an open area with basketball hoops on the other. The space was much larger than the outdoor areas at the independent schools. From what I understood, the

head teachers were not present outside, and the play yard was in use by several classes at once. The aims of outdoor play may take on a different quality when teachers are not present to support children in their social negotiations. In the 4/5s and the kindergarten classes, where teachers were present, it was evident that the outdoor play created a venue for fostering children's social development.

Class Schedule

Looking at each of the class's schedules, there are many similarities. All three seem to address the developmental needs of young children, as well as the elements that might support effective classroom management: as few transitions as possible, significant amount of time outdoors, an expanse of time in which to play and explore classroom materials, and time dedicated to group discussion, as well as the necessities of snack, lunch, and rest. Each schedule included 50 minutes to an hour of outdoor play in the morning. Twice a week, Jane's 4/5s used the play deck in the afternoon for at least 45 minutes, in addition to attending gym and movement classes once a week. Ali's pre-k/k students have physical education at least twice a week, typically in the afternoon. The 4 and 5-year-olds in these classes seem to have many opportunities in their daily schedules to move their bodies, which addresses the needs of young children to release their energy and exercise their gross motor muscles. The afternoons for the 5 and 6-year-olds in Sara's kindergarten class seemed to include a mixture of special classes, including Spanish, science, and music, as well as time for working in the classroom. They did not appear to have another period of time outdoors.

Each schedule included a "meeting" time, when the whole group joined together to have discussions or talk about the plans for the day. The meeting was shortest in the

pre-k/k class at fifteen minutes on the schedule and twenty minutes on the morning of my observation, which seemed to match the children's capacity for maintaining interest and remaining seated. The meeting times for the other classes were scheduled to last twenty to thirty minutes. On the morning of my observation in Jane's class, the morning meeting lasted for 35 minutes. This seemed too long as the meeting was ending, with children beginning to grow restless. Jane conducted this meeting before going onto the play deck, and then had an additional "worktime" meeting after snack and before worktime, which lasted for 25 minutes. While the children seemed quite engaged during both meetings, and Jane acknowledged to the group that they had been sitting for a long time, it seemed like too much sedentary time for 4 and 5-year-olds. The other two classes appeared to combine their morning meeting with their worktime meeting, which ended with the children finding their places for "worktime" in the kindergarten and "activity time" in the pre-k/k. Each class had a significant portion of the day set aside for uninterrupted play and work with classroom materials—at least an hour most mornings and time in the afternoons on most days, as well. The pre-k/k class had some afternoon time dedicated to number work and small-group work in reading, writing, or math. Since I observed in the morning, I did not have the opportunity to see this work in action. Part of the worktime in Sara's kindergarten class was dedicated to half-group work with a math teacher, but the children still had an extended period of time to do other types of work, such as drawing and block building. In all three settings, children seemed to have the necessary time to engage with their peers and with materials, without being rushed.

Transitions: Transitional Devices and Frequency of Transitions

Transitions can easily turn into moments of upheaval in a classroom. All three teachers mentioned transitions during their interviews. Jane talked about the difficulties of schedule transitions for young children, stating that "change is just always hard on some level." She believes in making "routines clear and consistent" and "building predictability" as a way to offset the challenges presented by the transitions throughout the school day. Sara also discussed the importance of routine and predictability in her kindergarten class. For her as a teacher, children who experience difficulties moving from one part of the day to another could elicit feelings of frustration, and seem to require increased teacher "support and patience." She acknowledged feeling grateful to have another teacher in the room to help smooth out these transitions—as opposed to the struggles of teaching solo. Ali mused about learning effective transitional techniques over time, such as helping children gather in a line by employing humor and drama, saying something such as, "Do you think you can crawl like a baby and not bump into the person in front of you?" One can see these teachers' thoughts about transitions reflected in my observations.

Frequency of Transitions

As discussed in the previous section, the daily schedule for each class seemed to offer significant portions of time for each part of the day. This not only provides children with opportunities to delve into their work, but also removes the need for frequent transitioning. Within the breakdown of the day, there were more transitions than one could glean simply from looking at the schedule on paper. For instance, in Jane's 4/5s, during meeting, Jane asked the children to move from their meeting spots at the edge of

the rug to a "story shape" in the center. Certain transitions also require several steps, such as going to the play yard for Ali's pre-k/k class. First, children collected their jackets from their hallway cubbies, met on the rug to discuss their outdoor plans, gathered in a line, and walked down a flight of steps. However, all three classes seemed to have a manageable number of changes within the school day, appropriate for the age groups represented. The observations took place in the spring, and at that time of the year the transition routines seemed quite familiar and comfortable for the children.

Transitional Devices

Cleanup signals. Patterns emerged in each classroom as I observed transitions. There was a certain sense of preparation for moving from one time of day to another, particularly during parts of the day requiring cleanup, for instance from arrival to meeting or worktime to lunch. At the end of arrival in Jane's 4/5s, teachers circulated throughout the room letting children know that it was almost time to clean up. Five minutes later, it was a child's job to signal cleanup, making musical sounds with a wooden frog—a recognizable signal to other children in the class. They began to return materials to their rightful places almost immediately. In Sara's kindergarten, she used a rainmaker to sound that it was time to put materials away at the end of arrival. Ali gave her pre-k/k students a briefer time to transition by announcing to the whole group, "Two minutes 'til cleanup." When it was time to clean up, Ali provided another full-group reminder. The children did not begin to clean up upon hearing this information and the paraprofessional and the assistant replaced most of the items. I was out of the room when they were cleaning up at the end of activity time, but cleanup occurred quite rapidly, most likely with much assistance from the teachers—not unusual in early childhood settings. In all three classes,

teachers worked with the children to clean up. However, the students in Jane's 4/5s seemed to play a more involved role in their indoor cleanup process. This shared endeavor has implications for the sense of responsibility that teachers model and foster in their students, contributing to overall classroom management.

Singing, movement, and drama. There were occasions when singing, body movement, and pretending were utilized to begin or foster the successful completion of a transition. At times, Jane used song as a way to *signify* a transition, for instance singing, "4s, 5s, books away," to note the final part of the transition from snack to worktime meeting. In the pre-k/k class, Charlene, the assistant teacher, employed drama in a manner that resounded with Ali's interview comments. During the transition from the classroom to the play yard, Charlene encouraged the children to glide downstairs like *mariposas* (butterflies), asking them to fly to their spots in line, and remain quiet like butterflies during the walk. This request seemed to be attractive to several of the children and, abiding by this request, they fluttered over to their spots in line, jostling each other a bit in the process.

Singing and movement were also incorporated as transitional devices during certain moments when children were being asked to wait during a transition. For example, while some children continued to clean up on the play deck and others were finished and gathering on the ledge to go inside, Jane began singing a mixed up version of "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" with the 4/5s. This seemed to help focus their attention while giving them an opportunity to move their bodies, addressing the challenge of asking young children to wait. Similarly, Megan, the assistant teacher in the kindergarten class, prompted children to follow her sound and movement patterns while

waiting for others to finish cleaning up at the end of worktime, which also seemed to help children endure the waiting process. When waiting for children to settle down for meeting, however, Sara first pointed out the "steady" behavior of one child, and then sat with the chatter and ensuing silence for several minutes until each and every kindergartner was considered ready to start meeting. This lengthy, silent waiting seemed to stand in contrast to some of the transitional techniques employed in the other two classrooms.

Location, Amenities, and Space

As noted previously in the "Environment" section, classroom location and amenities can have an impact on the flow of transitions. In the pre-k/k class, the most difficult transition was the one that required the children to move from their classroom to the play yard, which entailed walking through hallways and down stairs. With the assistant teacher heading the line alone, the entire process was nearly derailed when one child momentarily refused to walk with the group. The 4/5s on the other hand, with the classroom attached to the play deck, could make their transition to the outdoors piecemeal, with one teacher waiting on deck for those who were ready and the other teacher helping children put their jackets on inside. There was no waiting involved, and children could make an immediate transition.

Having at least one toilet and two sinks in each class also eased transitions. These amenities were extremely useful during the shifts to snack and lunch, when children washed their hands. During transitions such as these, teachers were thoughtful about not calling too many children at once, and regulating the flow of traffic in and out of bathroom spaces. In addition, when children in Jane's 4/5s put their coats on and took

them off, teachers reminded them to spread out throughout the classroom to avoid bumping into others. Order appeared to be maintained during transitions from one part of the day to another by ensuring that children had personal space, an essential aspect of classroom management. Children also had a plan. For instance, children and teachers in each classroom made decisions about which area of the room children would go to when they left the meeting rug to begin worktime or activity time. Again, children were called a few at a time, which seemed to diffuse any potential rushing or crowding problems, a potential source of so much conflict.

Group Living: Child-Child Interactions, Teacher-Child Interactions, and Teacher Involvement in Resolving Children's Conflicts

Learning to live together as a group and form a classroom community is something that the teachers spoke about in their interviews, with Jane and Ali indicating the social and emotional curriculum as an important piece of classroom management. Jane stated:

> Growing as a group and growing into being a group and knowing how to be a group, and all the things you need to know about group living and social skills and all of that plays into one's ability to manage the classroom. My guess is that you might have fewer areas where you feel that this is really hard and they're out of control and it's chaotic, if you have a group that's more gelled… It's almost like we ask them to care for the classroom, we ask them to care for each other.

This sentiment was revealed in Ali's interview when she talked about her pre-k/k class. A firm supporter of mixed-age class groupings, Ali pointed out the helping and empathetic relationships that emerge between the older and younger children. Both teachers

discussed the significance of language in the classroom—the positive noticing that teachers model for their students in addition to helping children learn how to talk with their peers to resolve conflicts. Sara talked about encouraging "the kids to articulate for themselves how they can help themselves," fostering that sense of independence in relation to their own self-regulation that she views as so essential for kindergartners. She also discussed the importance of developing trusting relationships with her students, helping students feel comfortable accepting teachers' help on a "bumpy day," a day when things seem to be going wrong, without the fear of "getting in trouble."

Child-Child Interactions

In each of the classrooms there seemed to be a strong sense of community, as demonstrated by the way in which children generally worked and talked with one another. In Jane's 4/5s, children performed classroom jobs together, such as filling out the attendance sheet, spraying the snails with water, and sponging down the tables after snack. They engaged in shared work during worktime and deck, which will be discussed further in the section, "Opportunities for shared work." During group meeting times, small group, and one-on-one discussions, children often spoke candidly and respectfully to one another. They also exhibited concern for one another. During snack, one little girl expressed concern that there was only a small amount of juice left for a friend. In Ali's pre-k/k class, one child worried that her friend had not been asked to make a choice for activity time, and she called this to Ali's attention (though the child had actually been called). There were also interactions with rough edges, which is typical of the age and of child behavior. For instance, children expressed annoyance from time to time. During worktime in Jane's 4/5s class, a small group was sitting together at a table and three

children expressed frustration listening to a long story being told by one of their peers. A boy groaned, "When is this story going to end? I'm tired of listening to this big, long, stinky story."

Overall, children appeared to feel comfortable with one another in all three classes. While working with materials, most children in the three settings chatted with one another and sought help and opinions from their peers. For instance, in Ali's pre-k/k class, two children wanted to use the same marker, and one girl asked politely, "Can I use that after you?" While drawing in Sara's kindergarten class, one girl asked another how to spell the word "can," and her classmate sounded out the word. In the three settings, it was clear that the children relied on one another. These are small examples, but they are meant to express that a genuine feeling of comfort and caring among children seemed to be present in all of my observations. This is also revealed in the discussion of conflict resolution below.

Teacher-Child Interactions

While I will discuss classroom tone in more detail in the next section, it is important to note that all three teachers had a gentle manner of speaking with children. During my observation in each classroom, teachers never raised their voices to yell. They spoke with children respectfully and seemed to model language and caring for their students. During arrival in the 4/5s, a child rushed to hug Teresa while Jane knelt down to warmly welcome others. Similar warmth was felt in Ali's pre-k/k class and, in certain instances, she called her students by terms of endearment, which felt natural in the context of that classroom. All three teachers helped children stay focused and on task by giving soft and gentle reminders—both verbal and nonverbal. They also provided

comfort to disappointed or upset children: Jane knelt down to speak compassionately with a little boy whose building had been knocked over; Ali remembered a child's earlier disappointment and chose her for a special job; Sara coaxed a crying child out from under the climber on the play roof and distracted him from his woes by asking him if he knew any climbing tricks. These are just a few examples of the way that these teachers acknowledged and attended to their students' emotional needs.

The "positive noticing" that Jane mentions in her interview was apparent in all three classes. Jane, Ali, and Sara all called attention to work and behaviors that they found favorable. During arrival, two boys in the 4/5s were eager to share their work with Jane and she responded with a grin, looking at the details of their structure. On deck, Jane commented to a child who was engaging in dramatic play that her depiction of an infant crying in the backseat of a car really resonated with her own experiences as a mother. Full of excitement, children in the pre-k/k class also rushed to show Ali their watercolor paintings of the radishes from the garden, and Ali responded in kind. In the kindergarten class, Sara was quick to draw the group's attention to one child's "steady" behavior at meeting as she waited for others to settle down. She was also made affirming remarks such as, "That was really clear," when a child explained how she arrived at a certain answer.

Explicit discussions about less desirable behavior were also a part of classroom life for the 4/5s. During meeting, a boy raised his hand to share with the class that he was disappointed that Jane had not chosen him to read out the day's schedule. Jane acknowledged and appreciated that he had not yelled or disrupted the group when he experienced that disappointment. Later, during lunch, Teresa, the assistant teacher,

noticed one child teasing another and spoke openly with the pair about how teasing might make one feel. Learning how to express one's feelings and how to treat one another respectfully seemed to be an important part of classroom functioning in the 4/5s.

Teacher Involvement in Resolving Children's Conflicts

In Sara's kindergarten class, it was noticeable how few conflicts emerged throughout the morning. Indoors, this calm atmosphere may have been the result of strong expectations for quiet and steady behavior. However, the lack of conflict and the ease with which children handled the few conflicts that arose was particularly striking on the play roof, where children were given a lot of freedom, and teachers appeared to be actively observing from the sidelines, rarely getting involved in children's play. On one occasion, Sara approached a group of children who had made an obstacle course for the scooters. Two boys had rolled their bodies onto another boy. Sara gently asked the two boys to get off of their friend, and checked in with the boy to make sure that he was all right. Children were dealing with the challenge of sharing a limited number of scooters. Sara mediated the negotiations, asking one child to explain to another how he was going to share the scooter and asking the listener if that sounded like a fair plan. After Sara returned to her spot on the bench, the children continued these negotiations themselves, self-imposing time limits for using the scooters.

Jane had a more noticeable presence on the play deck with the 4/5s, guiding an organized game of tag, and later helping children work through a conflict that emerged. When one child felt as if he were being shot at by a group of five boys who had built a structure out of hollow blocks, a spaceship with cannons, he approached Jane to ask for help with the situation. Jane brainstormed with all six boys, talking extensively with the

boy who had asked for help, to conjure up a suitable and satisfying solution and to ensure that all the children felt safe. It was obvious that these types of conversations were a common way that children resolved conflicts in this class. At times, the resolutions may involve the interjection of a teacher, but the children were certainly practicing how to carry on these dialogues on their own.

There was a small conflict that emerged during arrival in the pre-k/k class. A group of children were playing dominoes, and one child was crying. Charlene, the assistant teacher, approached the children to ask what was going on. After listening to the story of the crying child, who had only three dominoes, Charlene suggested that everyone count the number of dominoes in front of them. Without having to order anyone to share the game pieces, the child with the most silently began to return several to the bin. Like the incidents in the other two classes, listening and discussion was the centerpiece of resolving this conflict. Teachers did not look the other way when conflicts emerged; they approached conflict directly, helping children navigate the social realm. The actions of the teachers in all three classes required children to think about their situations and figure out solutions. Teachers did not provide the answers, but rather acted as guides to help children find their own.

Classroom Tone

As discussed above, the teachers all had a gentle way of interacting with the children in their classes. However, each classroom had a distinct tone, not entirely easy to depict in a paper. In Jane's 4/5s, the children burst into the room excitedly during arrival. This enthusiasm and energy that children brought into the room was balanced with a calmness that Jane seemed to cultivate through her soft, kind interactions with children

and her quiet, solid presence. She listened thoughtfully to children and responded with genuine understanding to their needs as young children, for instance the need to move their bodies after sitting for a long period of time. There was a sense of routine and order, but room for the possibility of the unexpected, space for a child to enter the room late and share his exciting news with the group about the birth of a cousin. This was similar to Ali's pre-k/k class, which possessed a feeling of spontaneity—there was a plan for the day, but there was also space for naturalness, a laid-back quality that seemed to trust that a mishap with a child's shoe which delayed the start of story time was not going to send the class off course, a spontaneity that provided children with the freedom to suggest doing watercolor paintings of radishes freshly picked from the school garden. In the 4/5s and the pre-k/k class, classrooms grew noisy with the sound of children working. It was much quieter in Sara's kindergarten class, though the children appeared to be just as engaged. In all three classes, children generally approached classroom materials with enthusiasm, and the work periods had a strong feeling of industriousness, with virtually no one left idle.

In Sara's kindergarten class, there was a dichotomy between the classroom tone indoors and outdoors. Inside, the classroom had a quiet, almost muted atmosphere. There appeared to be serious expectations for children to be "steady," quiet, and extremely calm—a constant need to exhibit self control. Teachers and children frequently referred to the idea of being steady, and what it meant to be steady. These behavioral expectations seemed to color the day. During group meeting times, teachers waited several minutes for all children to be quiet and still in order to proceed. It was striking how incredibly calm the class was. Children seemed interested in their work and discussions, and arrived with

excitement to begin the day, but the tone of the class seemed most free and lively when the children were playing on the roof. The teachers appeared to be relaxed, and the children were trusted to engage in a wide variety of climbing, building, and dramatic play with very few comments and little to no shepherding from teachers. As noted in the observation, the teachers watched carefully, but said nothing when a group of girls were building their own climbing apparatus. Their work was not extremely perilous, but some might have seen their balancing and climbing as worthy of a word of caution. Both the children and the teachers seemed to feel safe and comfortable with the experimentation with physical feats and with children playing freely outside.

Opportunities for Discussion

During my observations, children in all three classes had opportunities to speak with teachers and peers one-on-one, in small groups, and in whole group settings. Each class had a set time in their schedule to meet with the entire group at least once during the day. These meetings appeared to be intended as a forum for the exchange of ideas and they also covered housekeeping activities such as reading the daily schedule. On the day that I observed in Ali's pre-k/k class, the format of the meeting was not discussion-based—it was interactive and brief, which seemed to suit the attention-span of the children. Ali introduced the idea of making hardboiled eggs, and asked each child if s/he wanted one for snack. She marked off a number on a counting chart for each child who answered yes. Children seemed intrigued as they watched her put the eggs into a large pot for boiling. There was more of an opening for group discussion after they read the story about composting, which related to their work in the school garden; children asked questions and made comments about the content of the book.

On the other hand, the kindergartners' meeting was almost entirely discussion driven. Sara posed a question in the written morning message and opened the floor for children to respond. They were discussing the play about immigration that the 4th graders had performed. Children raised their hands to offer their observations about the props and the actors, and to make comments such as, "I didn't know that some families had their names changed." They also asked serious questions about why people were emigrating from Europe and not the Caribbean. When one child forgot what he wanted to say, Sara and the children supported him, and helped figure out what he had been thinking about. This seemed to be an intimate time for this group, where children generally appeared to feel comfortable sharing their ideas. They were eager to participate.

Jane's 4/5s had two meetings, a morning meeting and a worktime meeting. While both were interactive, a large portion of the morning meeting was devoted to reading a book of stories written by the children at home about how the people in their families care for one another, with an individual page for each child. Although Jane was reading, she would stop to ask the children the pronunciation of the names of their family members, and children were eager to respond. As mentioned in my written observation, the children seemed to be valued as experts—possessing the knowledge of their own families. During the worktime meeting, the focus was on unit blocks—both their characteristics and the building that children had done. Jane provided the structure for the meeting, though the children responded to one another instead of conducting the conversation through the teacher. She told children that they were going to have a "block share," and she called up individual children to share photos of their structures. One at a time, two children had the opportunity to show their photos to the other children and

describe their structures. These individuals called on peers who had their hands raised to ask questions and Jane reminded the presenters to alternate calling on boys and girls. The content of this meeting consisted of an enthusiastic conversation among the students. Children certainly had the time—sometimes it seemed like a bit too much time for this age group as the children began to show signs of restlessness—to share their thoughts and to raise questions with the group.

In the three classes, the social aspect was very much a part of the children's work, which included open segments of time for conversations to emerge. In addition to whole group meeting times, the lengthy time to work with materials in the classroom, play outdoors, and eat snack and lunch all offered children opportunities to interact with one another in both structured and unstructured ways—chances for planned and spontaneous discussion. Children had the space to engage in both private and public interchanges with their peers. Throughout my observations, I heard snippets of chatter, examples of the ways in which children felt comfortable asking for help from a peer, were eager to respond to a friend's request, and planned together to further their play and their work, whether it was while spelling the word "can" in Sara's kindergarten class, burying "bones" (shells) in the sand in Jane's 4/5s, or playing with the farm animals in Ali's pre-k/k class. Children also had opportunities to engage in the type of problem-solving and conflict resolution depicted in the previous section about group living. Especially noticeable in Jane 4/5s class, all three teachers, as well as their associate and assistant teachers, made it a point to stop and listen to children talk about their struggles and their work throughout different parts of the morning.

Opportunities for Children to Choose Activities and Work

During the teacher interviews, a theme emerged around needing to create systems, structures, and routines for children when thinking about classroom management. This idea was particularly salient for Sara who stated, "I've worked pretty hard to create systems that are consistent for them [the kindergartners] and child-friendly, and hopefully feel comforting to them and not restrictive to them so that they can do their best work but know what the limits are." This was Jane's final comment:

> I am more directive in many instances than I thought I would have been, and in some ways that works for a group, and actually opens up for them because if they're safe, they know what they know, and they know the parameters, that within those parameters, there's so much room for being creative and having their own voices. But they need—they so need—structures that are basically set from outside themselves, and they can fit themselves into it and still have so much of their own improvisation.

These sentiments seem to speak to the notion of choice in the classroom, and reflect some of what I observed during my visits to the three classrooms—that children had the freedom to make choices once the parameters were clear, and that within the limits that teachers provided, children still had opportunities to make choices about how to spend their working and playing time. This began with arrival, when children in all three classes had the opportunity to begin their school day by choosing an activity from those that had been offered by teachers.

Outdoor Play

I did not observe Ali's pre-k/k class during their outdoor play time, though the start of it seemed to indicate that children were free to choose their activities. Sara's kindergartners seemed to have the freedom and trust to make their own decisions about what materials to use and who to engage with on their play roof. The assistant teacher gave children the information about which materials were open for use, and children made their choices within those limits. Similarly, the 4/5s also seemed free to decide for themselves the content of their play on deck, many building structures to support their dramatic play endeavors. However, most likely due to space restrictions, as well as the reality of sharing the space with the other 4/5s class for a total of forty students, if children were interested in running, they had to participate in an organized game of tag, which was facilitated by Jane. Again, there was ample room for choice within teacher-determined parameters. This reveals, however, that space and the size of a group of children can shape certain decisions for a teacher. Balancing the need for choice, particularly when making choices about work, and the need for limits seems to be important piece of classroom management.

"Worktime" and "Activity Time" Choices

Sara and Ali used the end of the morning meeting, and Jane the end of the worktime meeting, to decide where children would begin their classroom work period. In Sara's class, a math specialist was working with half groups, and Sara assigned nine children to work on a math game. She also asked another child to work on an alphabet book. The other children were offered these choices: bookmaking; drawing; table blocks; blocks; painting; writing. As children finished working on the math game, they chose one

of the other activities. The children appeared to be satisfied with their assigned and chosen activities, immediately settling down to work.

On the morning that I observed Jane's class, children appeared to have more voice in choosing their worktime activities, though there was still some assigned activities. Jane asked children to raise their hands if they wanted to build with unit blocks. Teresa called four children to work on self-portraits, what appeared to be an ongoing class project. Five children were on a list to work in the dramatic play area. Children seemed to have signed up for this group at an earlier time. The rest of the children were free to choose to work with sand, clay, drawing materials, or manipulatives. Later, when Teresa was finished helping children with their portraits, she opened the woodworking table. This was a busy and industrious work period, with children generally seeming invested in their work.

The children in Ali's pre-k/k class had an energetic approach to their "activity time," as well. On the day of my visit, all the children were free to participate in an activity of their choosing during their open work period. They chose among the following: blocks; dress-up; computer; sand; art materials; garden. There was a number limit for each area, and Ali asked children to make a different choice if an area was already at capacity, a request that was well-managed by the children. Ali also suggested making waiting lists for certain activities if necessary, and children were receptive to this idea. There was the sense that children would have an opportunity to work with the materials that they were seeking, even if it required some waiting. Children seemed fully engaged in the activities that they had chosen, and one child introduced the idea of a different type of work—painting—when she returned from her trip to the garden. This seemed to be another form of choice in the pre-k/k classroom, welcoming the

spontaneous ideas of children. This demonstrates to children that their thinking has an impact on their environment. In each of the classes, many children made efforts to talk with their peers about their work and many were eager to show and discuss their work with teachers, as well.

Opportunities for Shared Work

It seems too difficult to begin this piece without first referring back to John Dewey. Dewey (2001/1915) contends that "out of the occupation, out of doing things to produce results, and out of doing these in a social and cooperative way, there is born a discipline of its own kind and type" (p. 12). It was impressive to observe 4, 5, and 6 year old children busy at work in the three different classrooms, and to see how smoothly the classes functioned during those times. In her interview, Jane noted the connection between classroom management and materials, between a busy work period and children's ability to self-regulate:

> If you have one of those really busy worktimes when children are excited to go work with materials, if they're using some of those energies that can get frenetic and silly, if they're invested in their work, your most frenetic and silly child will often have… the most productive, focused worktime…. As a connection with classroom management, what you offer in terms of materials can ground children and that you expect them to get grounded, that it's busy working time, and it doesn't mean it's not socializing time because they always learn in a social context, and it's collaborative…When children really engage with what they do, self-regulation is *much* easier for them.

One can easily see the link between Jane's statements about a classroom on a practical level and what Dewey (2001/1915) philosophically asserted about the diminished need for a top-down, authoritarian teacher presence when the curriculum and materials being offered to children hold their interest.

Sara also viewed curriculum and materials as central to classroom management, claiming:

> … you have to think of the curriculum as being appropriate, whether they enter the curriculum through appropriate materials, whether those materials are accessible to them, how do they know how to use them, how do they get practice with them. You would see in a course listing "classroom management" as separate from "curriculum," but I sort of see it as all-encompassing."

Sara's group of 5 and 6-year-olds seemed busy and engaged, while generally following teacher expectations to maintain a quieter classroom atmosphere, something that seemed less prominent in the other two classes. Perhaps because the kindergarten group was on the older side, in addition to the teacher expectations, there also seemed to be less hustle and bustle than the indoor work periods in the other classes. The half-class participation in making math games may have contributed to a more sedentary atmosphere. In any case, children were eager to chat as they worked on the math game. There was also room during this work period for children to share their ideas with both teachers and peers. For instance, Sara listened as a child explained the story plot for her book, and the girls at the drawing table discussed their endeavors as they made paper-creations. However, materials are not always the predictor for smooth classroom management. One child, who was building with unit blocks, grew more interested in

jumping over his structure with his friend than in building, not surprising for a kindergartner—sometimes the pull of the social is more than the pull of the curriculum. Perhaps this is why feeding children's social needs, and helping them work together, seem so central to effective classroom management.

The kindergartners' outdoor play seemed to offer them open opportunities to collaborate and play freely. The materials appeared to invite them to work together. In pairs and groups, children moved boards, blocks, ladders, and triangles to create climbing structures. Another group built an obstacle course for scooters out of hollow blocks. Later, it was a challenge to take turns with the scooters, but with Sara's facilitation, the draw of the activity was more salient than their own personal wishes—they thought about ways to negotiate taking turns riding the scooters, fulfilling the needs of the group in addition to their individual needs. This was similar to the spaceship-builders in Jane's 4/5s who encountered trouble taking turns being the driver. Ultimately, they were more interested in furthering the play. So high was their level of investment in their building and dramatic play efforts, they agreed to take limited turns. During these outdoor play periods, children in both classes seemed to feel a sense of ownership, and appeared to feel competent in their work. Jane fostered this feeling of competence as she roamed the deck, listening to children share their ideas about their structures and the content of their dramatic play.

It is not merely participation in shared work, but also having opportunities to share one's work with others that seems to contribute to positive classroom management. Jane spoke about the importance of this sharing in encouraging children to feel invested in their work and in taking care of materials. She said, "You don't just go build with

blocks, but it's knowing that their [children's] teachers and then they themselves value this as important, real work, so you take care of your materials." This sentiment was reflected in Jane's actions as she did things such as bending down to look closely at a child's hollow block structure, listening intently as the boy explained, "This is the battery tank." This also might mean introducing curriculum and materials that respond to the needs of specific children. Ali spoke about helping Sandy, a little girl, cope with her "sibling angst" after the birth of her baby sister. As Sandy's feelings intensified, her social interactions with peers grew more heated. Ali said that she was often telling friends, "I hate you. You're not coming to my party." Trying to address the root of the girl's powerful feelings about becoming an older sister, Ali thought to get out a miniature baby doll and offered children the task of making beds for the baby. Not only did this become an activity to which Sandy repeatedly returned, it also became a place where other children wanted to join her. Children wanted to share in this work with her and they wanted to share her company, as well. Although I was not present to see this for myself, during my observation in the Ali's pre-k/k class, it was evident that the materials available to children captured their interest. Children were eager to go to the library and to the garden. In the unit block area, three boys were acting out a scenario with farm animals. A boy and girl in the dress-up area were aptly caring for their baby dolls, carrying them around in large swathes of fabric tied to their bodies and cooking a meal for them. Children at the drawing table were having an animated conversation regarding the spelling of their names and the letters in the alphabet. Two boys at the sand and water table were mixing water with sand and pretending to give plastic spiders a bath. Children were doing many types of work and were exploring different materials and they seemed

fully engaged and full of energy. There was virtually no need for teachers to reprimand or even redirect these children. They were entirely absorbed in their work.

Conclusion

I was not sure what to expect at the outset of this endeavor. I began with questions—the ponderings of a new and learning teacher—about translating John Dewey's and Lucy Sprague Mitchell's views of classroom life into practice. As a relative novice, particularly in the realm of progressive education, issues of classroom management were at the forefront of my mind. I wondered if Dewey's and Mitchell's ideas about classroom management are reflected in present-day progressive education settings. It is not to say that I had never witnessed their ideas in action, but was often left to consider how it was that my teaching mentors navigated that translation so well. How do particular teachers manage their classrooms with such ease and grace, and the full engagement of their students? The wonderment resides in the *how*, which is what I ultimately examined through my classroom observations and teacher interviews, exploring how these ideas play out in the classroom and in teachers' minds. The fruits of my work resulted in the depiction of three distinct teachers, with common threads that drew them together, and individual styles, beliefs, and practices that stood them apart. In the paragraphs that follow, I will reflect on these teachers and their classroom practices through the lens of Dewey's and Mitchell's beliefs about the functioning of a classroom.

Jane, Ali, and Sara—all three influenced by Dewey's philosophy of education during their teacher preparation—were serious teachers who possessed strong shared values. It was apparent in the interviews and observations that each one gave deep consideration to the ideas and application of classroom management. With their similarities in mind, the portraits of these three women that have emerged also illuminate

their distinctions. From my brief glimpses into their classroom lives, it was Sara's kindergarten that in many ways stood in contrast to Jane's 4/5s and Ali's pre-k/k. Children appeared to be working productively and contentedly, yet there seemed to be a hushed atmosphere. Indoors, Sara spent a tremendous amount of time waiting for children to get *steady*, and impressing upon children the need to be quiet and calm. While Dewey (1915/2001) certainly expected teachers to maintain order in the classroom, I return again to his statement:

> *...if the end in view is the development of a spirit of social cooperation and community life, discipline must grow out of and be relative to such an aim* [italics added]. There is little of one sort of order where things are in process of construction; there is a certain disorder in any busy workshop; there is not silence; persons are not engaged in maintaining certain fixed physical postures; their arms are not folded; they are not holding their books thus and so. They are doing a variety of things, and there is the confusion, the bustle that results from activity. But out of the occupation, out of doing things to produce results, and out of doing these in a social and cooperative way, there is born a discipline of its own kind and type. Our whole conception of discipline changes when we get this point of view. (p. 12)

Outdoors, Sara's kindergartners were unleashed in this Deweyan manner, seeming to be entirely compelled not only by the materials available to them, but also by working with those materials together in small groups—remaining orderly yet free, with little need for reminders or intrusions from teachers. Indoors, however, the emphasis on self-regulation—steadiness—seemed to prevail, to an extent that it left one to wonder what

might have happened if children were allowed to veer ever so slightly off this path. As Sara explained in her interview, she was extremely cognizant of the need to create consistent systems and structures in order to help children "feel comfortable and confident in the work they do." She also gave a lot of thought to the children's role as kindergartners, and supporting their move toward independence by providing that sense of consistency for them. In addition, she talked about the importance of asking her students to think for themselves about how they could feel steady as "helping children make their own realizations." While all of this seems to help her classroom function in the secure and calm manner which I observed, it is unclear whether it leaves room for the roles of flexibility and spontaneity, as discussed by Dewey (1915/2001), and responsiveness to individual children, as described by Mitchell (1950), in classroom management.

Ali's pre-k/k class embodied a feeling of spontaneity. Ali possessed a certain willingness to pull out additional materials upon her students' requests, which encouraged children to further explore their interests, and she demonstrated an ability to cope with small interruptions in stride. This lent her a relaxed air, which seemed to extend itself to the children in her class, who, in addition to working industriously, managed themselves with ease during their open work period. Ali's interactions with children had a feeling of authenticity, which was something that Mitchell (1950) discusses in terms of a teacher revealing her humanity. Although Ali's interactions with students seemed the least mediated of the three teachers and she maintained a laid-back manner, it was evident that she was thoughtful and planned in her approach to the classroom and her students. Her curricular decisions were informed by concern for the

well-being of individual children. This attention to the social and emotional lives of her students in order to address the behavioral issues occurring in the classroom speaks to Mitchell's ideas about the need to think deeply about each individual child, as well as to Dewey's (1938) points about considering the needs of the individual as well as of the group as a whole. She acknowledged the primary role that engaging curriculum occupies in managing a classroom effectively, yet added that there is much more involved, particularly helping children develop the social skills necessary for group living. Ali discussed the idea of community within the classroom as she described the process that occurs at the beginning of the school year, when the older children in her class, the kindergartens, usher in the pre-kindergarten students, acting as experts and guides—setting up a "helping relationship" and increasing possibilities for developing empathy. This relates to Dewey's (1938) ideas about education as a "social process" (p. 58).

It should be noted that Ali was a teacher in a public school, and while she expressed frustration with the encroachment of academic pressures and standardized testing, this did not seem to set her classroom or her teaching practices apart from those of the two independent schools. Referring to her school, she stated:

> I think there's still the inclination and an attempt and a desire to create a different climate and to try and build for each age what it means to be a kind and a caring person, and part of a community and have a very strong sense of community, which I think is really great. I think that that comes out of valuing work and valuing kids, and teaching kids to value each other's work.

Ali's reference relates to the tension that is often felt in public schools—a conflict between increased time for academic demands and reduced time for the play that is so

necessary to foster the social and emotional developmental needs of young children. While Ali's school found ways to meet these challenges and uphold educators' essential beliefs about developmentally appropriate curriculum for young children, there are many public schools that are not able to do so. In those settings, it can be difficult to harmonize the type of classroom management envisioned by Dewey and Mitchell with what is required of teachers and children by the state and federal government; teachers' approaches to the schedule and the curriculum may be dictated by outside sources. Thus, the way in which the classroom operates may not evolve organically, and may leave little room for considering the social and emotional needs of children, possibly causing classroom management to be more unwieldy and top-down.

It is in Jane's 4/5s class that Dewey's and Mitchell's thoughts about classroom management seem to emerge and take form most prominently. Jane's comprehensive approach to the way in which a classroom functions was striking. Not only did she pay painstaking attention to classroom arrangement, materials, and curriculum but, similar to Ali, Jane gave remarkable thought to the social and emotional lives of her students, which is so much of what Mitchell (1950) addresses in her work. When a child's block structure tumbled down, Jane swiftly arrived at the child's side to offer an understanding and comforting remark and helped the child tackle the pile of blocks. Through her language and actions, Jane modeled the way in which people take care of one another. This evokes Dewey's (1916/2005) thoughts about "associated living," and the essential need to develop a sense of community within the classroom.

In Jane's interview, she noted the importance of physical and emotional safety in the classroom, and while she discussed the role of self-regulation for children, she also

seemed to honor the buoyant energy of her young students, acknowledging when her expectations for sedentary discussions were too high. Jane appeared to be in tune to her students' needs and she exhibited genuine interest in her students on many levels—their ideas, their social struggles, and their work. She allocated time for full group discussions with children but, during my observation, she allowed for space and time to speak individually with children while they were working and playing. Children were eager to share their work with Jane, and she would respond thoughtfully, noticing the details of their creations. Dewey's (1938) notion of offering learning experiences that are meaningful for children and that foster personal investment was quite evident in Jane's class. Children seemed enthusiastic in their approach to work from the moment they entered the classroom.

As one might gather from the portraits of these three teachers, managing a classroom is anything but simple, particularly when bearing in mind the ideas and ideals presented by John Dewey and Lucy Sprague Mitchell. The experience of dissecting and contemplating all that occurs within the short span of a morning, and all that teachers must consider, has only confirmed my belief that classroom management is extremely complex—that there is so much moving beneath the surface of a classroom. However, positive classroom management is not a mystery or an accomplishment only associated with "natural" teachers. This returns us to Lawrence Cremin's (1961/1964) critique that it would be the rare teacher who could meet the standards that Dewey sets for educators. He evoked the stereotype that has emerged of the progressive educator—a laissez-faire attitude posing as responsiveness to children and lack of planning as spontaneity, thus allowing the classroom to fall into chaos. While this caricature of the progressive teacher

may still exist, and the demands that Dewey places on teachers are tremendous, effective and nurturing classroom management is not a magical feat, relegated only to the gifted. There are ways to examine and think about how a classroom functions. Perhaps identifying and studying specific aspects of the workings of a classroom, as done in this paper, could help demystify the execution of positive classroom management.

It was fascinating to conduct the classroom observations, and see how the influence of Dewey and Mitchell emerged in various features of classroom management in each of the classes. Throughout this process, I found myself considering my own practices as a teacher in a progressive school. While I have certainly learned more about *how* teachers might embody a sense of Dewey or Mitchell in their classrooms, I am left to the challenge of putting that philosophy into practice myself. As the teachers in this study have revealed, approaching the classroom with Dewey's and Mitchell's ideals in mind turns classroom management into an engaging, intellectual pursuit for teachers. One must reflect, question, experiment, employ knowledge of child development, choose materials well, create curriculum thoughtfully, plan ahead—but remain flexible, interact authentically with students, demonstrate a genuine interest in children's thoughts and endeavors, foster a sense of community, consider the needs of the individual child and of the group, and bravely enter the social and emotional realms of young children. These are ideas as well as ideals—a guidepost to strive toward. Classroom management is a complex undertaking, which sets in motion an ongoing process of discovery for the teacher, who learns from experience.

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